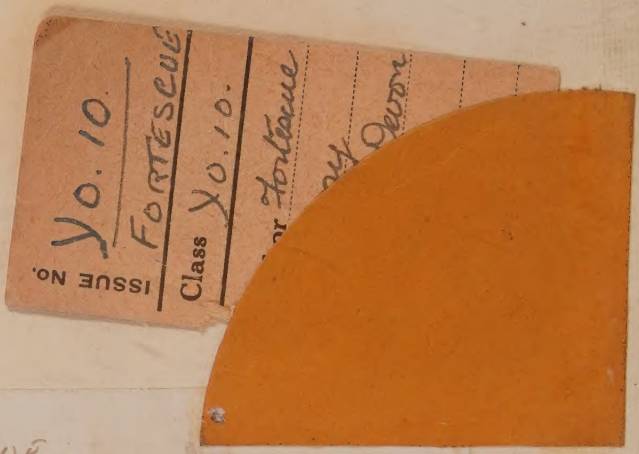
MY NATIVE DEVON

JOHN W. FORTESCUE



Yo. 10

FORTESCUE.

Swansea Public Libraries.

ADULT LENDING LIBRARY.

Open from 10 a.m. till 8 p.m. (except on Thursdays, when it closes at 1 p.m.)
Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays.

JUVENILE LENDING LIBRARY.

Open Monday to Friday, 12 noon to 2 p.m., and from 4 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7.30 p.m.

Closed on Thursdays, Sundays & Public Holidays.

Time Allowed for Reading.

This book is issued for 14 days and must be returned on or before the date last stamped on the date label. If kept beyond that date borrowers are liable to a fine of ONE PENNY per week or portion of a week and cost of notices.

Renewals.—The issue of a book may be renewed for a further period of 14 days.

Change of Books.—It is expected that borrowers will themselves exchange their books. Messengers will only have books entrusted to them at the discretion of the Librarian.

Protection of Books.—Borrowers must protect the books lent to them from any form of injury, or they will be required to pay a sum sufficient to repair or replace the book damaged.

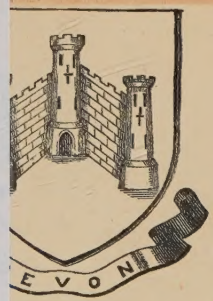
Change of Address must be notified to the Librarian at the earliest moment.

90 0763579 0

WITHDRAWN
FROM
UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH
LIBRARY SERVICES

University of Plymouth
Library
914.235 FOR.

Charles Seale-Hayne Library
University of Plymouth
(01752) 588 588
LibraryandITenquiries@plymouth.ac.uk



SEMPER FIDELIS.

PRESENTED TO THE

Swansea Public Library

BY THE

Swansea Devonian Society.

Wm. Taylor *President.*

June 1924

MY NATIVE DEVON

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA · MADRAS
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

MY NATIVE DEVON

BY

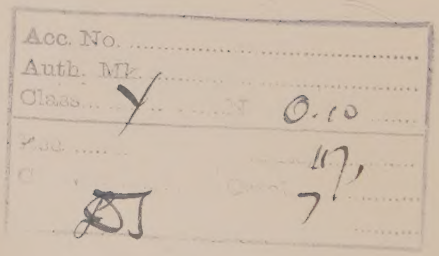
THE HON. JOHN W. FORTESCUE

AUTHOR OF
"THE STORY OF A RED DEER," "A HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ARMY," ETC.

SWANSEA PUBLIC LIBRARY
CENTRAL

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1924

COPYRIGHT


Acc. No. .....
Auth. Mk. .....
Class ... Y ... N 0.10 .....
... 17,
... 7 .....
DJ

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO

PEGGY AND JO.

NOTE

THE pieces entitled "Fifty Years Ago" appeared in shorter form in the *Morning Post*; the article on "The Devonshire Regiment" in the *Times*. I thank the Proprietors of these journals for permission to reproduce them.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Page from the Annals of Driverton	1
The White Witch to Scratton	21
Fifty Years Ago.	
I. Sunday in a Country Church	45
II. A Village Cricket Club	54
III. Our Friend the Miller	61
IV. Farmer Bill's Sale	69
V. A Bit of Poaching	76
VI. Harvesting	84
In Quarantine	89
The Killing of Blackmore's Pig	123
A Beginning and an End	134
A Family Butler	150
The Old One-horned Stag	172
A Run in a Gale	197
A Day on the Yellow Clay	205
A Great Day on a Little Stream	228
The North Devon Yeomanry	236
The Devonshire Regiment	252

SWANSEA PUBLIC LIBRARY CENTRAL

A PAGE FROM THE ANNALS OF DRIVERTON

I

In the parish of Northacott the owners of the Hall were distinguished by the population as "the present lord," which explains itself, "the late lord," meaning his father, and "the lord of all," which signified his grandfather, whose tenure covered the closing years of the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth century. Now the trusted medical adviser of the lord of all had always been Mr. Job Passmore of Driverton, who enjoyed considerable local reputation. Not only did every parish in the vicinity of Driverton ring with the fame of his cathartics, but he was supposed further to have wondrous skill in anatomy. Indeed, he had mounted the skeleton of a baby on wires; and though the age of the baby was uncertain and none of the later generation could say whether the article were composed

of real bones, human or other, or of wood ingeniously shaped to represent the same, it was none the less indubitable that Mr. Job possessed such a skeleton, handsomely polished, that it was the pride of his life, and that it was brought out for exhibition to his neighbours upon all great occasions. Driverton's population did not exceed eighteen hundred, and lived, for the most part, in a state of suspended animation from Saturday to Saturday, when the farmers came in for the market and the gentry for Petty Sessions and local administrative business. Still, in old days it had its little season, when folks came to dance at the Assembly rooms, though the only squire who owned a town-house in it had sold the building to a speculator, by whom it had been converted into the Prince Regent's Hotel. It was in the course of the season that Mr. Job entertained his friends at dinner at 3.30 in the afternoon, when the skeleton was always produced during dessert, passed round from hand to hand with complimentary comment from each guest, and finally restored to the apothecary amid a chorus of "Most interesting! Vastly interesting indeed." If the skeleton were not a work of art, it was beyond dispute an achievement of genius.

At the Hall, of course, Mr. Job did not aspire,

except when admitted to the chamber of a patient, to mount higher than the steward's room ; and yet there existed between him and his lordship's family a distant and respectful intimacy of a peculiar kind. It fell out in this wise. The lord of all had decreed that two of his daughters, Lady Euphemia and Lady Bridget, should journey to London in the family coach, with their tiring-maids and the housekeeper for protectresses, while he himself and her ladyship should start a week later in what he called the " char'ot," and what should be spelt the cabriolet. The two young ladies set forth accordingly, but had not proceeded for more than two miles before some slight mishap, necessitating repairs, overtook the coach. The obvious course, it should seem, would have been to return to the Hall ; but such was not the opinion of the two young ladies. They were still in their teens, and free for the first time in their lives, for one thing ; and, for another, they dreaded lest, if they returned, they might have to resume the journey in company with her ladyship, their mother, for his lordship rather liked having the char'ot to himself. In that case not only would they be kept in great order by that austere lady, but either one or both of them would have to ride with back to the horses. Such

travelling invariably made them feel sick; but this was a weakness which her ladyship resolutely refused to countenance. Not long before, a cousin, a frightened little girl of fourteen, had journeyed in that same family coach with her back to the horses, and after a time had given tremulous warning that she felt sick, the statement being heralded by symptoms which left little doubt that she was speaking the truth. Thereupon her ladyship, drawing herself up stiffly on the back seat, had uttered such a "Hoity-toity! To what a pass are we come if little girls cannot ride on the front seat!" as instantly silenced all protests and banished, through sheer terror, all qualms. The treatment was certainly effective, but it did not commend itself to the young ladies.

A short debate was therefore held, and upon the motion of Lady Bridget, the younger, the livelier, the prettier, and the more adverse to the front seat, it was proposed to walk the coach on for one mile to Driverton and to seek the hospitality of Mrs. Passmore until the repairs to the vehicle should be made good. Lady Euphemia seconded the motion quietly but energetically. The housekeeper made a show of opposition. "She didn't know what her ladyship would say"—but she was quickly won over by Lady Bridget, whom she

had admitted to the delights of the still-room cupboard at a very early age, and had spoiled ever since. The tiring-maids, knowing that all responsibility must rest upon the housekeeper, gave a silent vote with their young mistresses; the motion was unanimously carried, and the coach began slowly to climb the mile of hill that led to Driverton.

Words cannot describe the excitement in the town when the yellow coach rumbled slowly over the stones of the market square and pulled up at the apothecary's neat little white house just off High Street. It was hardly ten o'clock, and Driverton was just asking itself what the news was, when it was overawed by the presence, if not of a great county magnate, at any rate of some of his family. The boys in the market-place ceased playing marbles and ran to stand round the coach; a farmer who was driving sheep through the town forgot to tell his dog to "git vor 'em" at the right moment and allowed them to drift down the wrong street; the town-crier, who should have been calling, "O-yez, lost yesterday a small gilt lockat with 'nitials 'namelled blue containin' 'air," let his bell fall silent, and stood gaping; every tradesman rushed into the street; the postilions and strappers at the Prince

Regent came running out of the yard; every upper window was filled with female faces; and the only souls in Driverton who kept their heads were the blacksmith, who scented a possible job, the chymist, who was hoping that there might be work for him, and the attorney, Mr. Bendle, who, being clerk to the justices, was accustomed to sit in the presence of county magnates, and signified the fact to the world by standing at his office-door with his hand on his hip in an attitude of dignified though nervous calm. All doubts were presently set at rest by the progress of the coach, now empty, towards the forge; whereupon the blacksmith shouted with jocular triumph to the chymist, "I reckon 'tis me and not you that's wanted, Mr. Nozzery," and wiped his hands exultantly on the leather apron. At this Mr. Nosworthy, who had already observed with distress that the two young ladies, who had entered Mr. Passmore's door, looked exceedingly rosy and well, retired in dudgeon to his own place; leaving it to the populace to enjoy the sight of Lady Bridget's face peeping out of her poke bonnet, the fair ringlets hanging on each side of it, the dainty neck peeping out of her furred pelisse, and the little feet in their neat sandals.

But the sensation in the town was as nothing

to the gratified flutter aroused in the dwelling of Mr. Passmore himself. The little maid who opened the door curtsied to the ground when she saw the tall footman in the long buff coat and laced hat who had knocked. Having done so, she succumbed to total paralysis; but Mrs. Passmore herself, a lady of about forty, with a large white cap, an ample person, and a still ampler smile, bustled down, herself much perturbed, to welcome them. "Why, Lady Uphamie, Lady Bridget, what can I du vor 'ee? What du 'ee zay? Something gone wrong with the cooch? But, of course, Lady Uphamie; plaze to come right in. We'm proud and happy to zee 'ee both. And there, there's Mr. Passmore been called away to Shugford, twenty miles away, and I can't tell when he'll be 'oom again. Oh! he will be vexed to think that he has missed the honour of recavin' 'ee. But plaze to sit down, Lady Bridget, yurr, by the vire, for I reckon yu'm cold, and sweetly pretty yu'm looking, if I may make so bold." And then there was great discussion of plans. The housekeeper had insisted that they must reach Ramford that night, but that was only fourteen miles, and it was light till seven. They need not start until five, and then Mrs. Passmore would have time to send out cards for a small

party to meet her illustrious guests in the afternoon. The hearts of the girls leaped for joy, for they would see all Driverton.

It would be tedious to tell of Mrs. Passmore's distraction between the anxieties of making preparations and of showing herself duly agreeable to her guests. She attempted to delegate a part of the latter duties to her daughter Lizzie ; but this, owing to the girl's agonized shyness, was a failure. However, Lady Bridget, seeing a harp in the corner of the room, sat down to it and sang, with the result that Lizzie gaped at her with open-mouthed rapture, and all the servants in the kitchen stopped work in order to hear the music. From time to time Mrs. Passmore looked in to be quite sure that her guests were comfortable, but at last she came in hot and flustered and said, " Lady Bridget, 'tis swate of yu to zing to my Lizzie, and yu du zing like an angel ; but my maids be so mazed to hear 'ee that we can't get on. Now, if you would du us the honour to zing to the company this afternune—I hardly dare to ask it—if I might make so bold——"

" Of course I will, Mrs. Passmore," answered Bridget ; " or rather, Phemie and I will sing you a duet."

" Well, well, well ! " exclaimed Mrs. Passmore,

quite overcome, " if ever there was tu dear swate young ladies—and what was yu a-zinging now? It sounded to me like a strange tongue."

" It was Italian," replied Miss Bridget.

" I-talian ! " exclaimed Lizzie, her shyness suddenly overcome by intense interest. " There's an I-talian lady come to live in Snellbridge."

" Lizzie, be *quite*," interrupted her mother sharply. " Come 'long now and help Polly in the kitchen." And she led the way, while Lizzie ran abashed from the room after her, leaving the two sisters burning with curiosity to know more of the Italian lady.

Presently Mrs. Passmore, after a short absence, reappeared in her very best black silk, with an astonishing shell cameo brooch on her bosom; and the girls laid themselves out to allay her inexplicable irritation, and to restore poor Lizzie to favour. This they did by careful dwelling upon Lizzie's merits and attractions; and presently Mrs. Passmore, wholly mollified, opened her heart to them. " Yu see, my dear young ladies, I haven't no child but Lizzie. I've prayed many times for a boy, but God hathn't given me but the one maid, and I reckon He knoweth best. Now there's a clever young 'potticary down to Rackford—yu know where Rackford is, close to

Snellbridge—Courtenay his name is, and very proud of it he is tu—not but there's Courtenays sowed all over the country so thick as pays, as you know, Lady Uphamie, varmers and labourers and all sorts. But he saith as he's dayscended from the Emperors of Constan-ti-nople, and that 'tis all written down so plain as can be in a history buke by—by—what was the name again? by the larned Mr. Gibbins—yas, Gibbins it was, but no kin to Mr. Sam Gibbins down to Shortacombe, Lady Uphamie, him that had two eyes of different colours and always wore blue coat and brown breeches to match them—terrible vain Mr. Sam was. Yu'll find it, saith he to me, in the larned Mr. Gibbins's hist'ry, a di-di-digestion, I think he said it was, a digestion of the family of Courtenay. And there the pedigree's all drawn out, so fine as a bell-wire—at least, so I understand, for I haven't seen the buke myself. Well," here Mrs. Passmore lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper, " this Mr. Courtenay is a bit taken with my Lizzie—at least so I think, if shape's eyes mean anything—and when I spoke to Mr. Passmore about it, ' Well,' he saith, ' I'm getting up five-and-forty years of age, and if he doth marry her, I'll make him my partner and he shall carry on the practice when I'm gone, and, please God,

his son after him.' But plaze not to say naught about it, my dear young ladies," added Mrs. Passmore, raising her voice to make the adjuration, " not to *no* one. Bless your life, there's a knock, and the company coming," and she rushed to the mirror to put her cap straight, with the final thrilling words, " Yu'll see Mr. Courtenay in a minute."

And with that the company crowded in ; and presently the little parlour was gorged with a crowd of quite twenty persons, the Reverend Luke Smallridge, the Vicar, with his plump wife and her thin sister ; Mr. Bendle, the attorney, and Mrs. Bendle ; Mr. Vellacott, the mayor, who also was of the long robe, and his very plain daughter ; Major Parminter, late of the East India Company's service, with a yellow face and a grievance, and others of whom it is necessary only to mention Mr. Courtenay, who was a good-looking young man with apparently a very fair conceit of himself. Mrs. Passmore moved about exultantly presenting her guests to the two girls, who, to use the modern phrase, had the time of their lives. Mr. Courtenay at once attached himself to Lady Bridget, who, at ordinary moments, might have encouraged him to make a fool of himself, but now, for Lizzie's sake, kept him

primly in his place. Then after due interval the harp was brought out, thereby crowding some of the company into the passage, and Lady Bridget bent her pretty face over the instrument, and the girls sang first one duet and then, in response to enthusiastic appeals, a second; and the whole company closed in round them with thanks and congratulations.

"You were singing in Italian," remarked Major Parminter to Miss Bridget; "pray have you made the acquaintance of our latest addition to the little circle round Driverton, Countess Fagottina?"

"No," answered Bridget, happy in her chance; "*pray* tell me all about her."

"She is an exceedingly charming person——" began the Major.

"And strikingly handsome," put in Mr. Courtenay.

"Where did you say that this interesting person was staying?" asked the Vicar.

"At Snellbridge, I believe, on the advice of Squire Pike," responded the Major; and the Vicar knit his brows, for Squire Pike did not enjoy the best of reputations in clerical circles. But Mr. Bendle now joined the group, with some information, but more curiosity, concerning the Countess Fagottina; and details began to flow

PUBLIC CENTRAL

fast. The Countess was foreign-looking, though not remarkably so, but she had brought two foreign servants with her. No, she was not very dark—in fact, her eyes were grey—at least so Mr. Courtenay maintained, though the Major averred that they were brown. She was very well dressed. In fact the name of the Countess was in every one's—or at least in every man's—mouth, when Mrs. Passmore, who had made a hurried visit to inspect the refreshments in the dining-room, returned and caught the sound of it, as it happened, from the tongue of Mr. Courtenay. With a smiling face she made her way into the circle with, "I must ask you to excuse me, gentlemen. Lady Bridget, here, I want to spake to 'ee."

She led the girl apart into the passage, and asked, "Who was it that yu was spaking of, Lady Bridget? That person that's come lately to Snellbridge, wasn't it now? I know her; at laste I've seen her. Some say that she's an I-talian countess," continued Mrs. Passmore, her voice gathering shrillness as her wrath increased, "and some say that she's a nace of the Poop of Room, but between you and me, Lady Bridget, I consider that she's no better than she shude be."

She ended this judgement with an energy that left Bridget gasping and on the verge of

irrepressible giggles; but happily at this moment Mr. Passmore entered, round and rosy of face, with a shock of grizzled hair, having been unexpectedly relieved from his long ride; and his surprise and overwhelming prostration over the honour which awaited him banished for the moment all other topics of conversation. He could not forgive himself for receiving the two young ladies in his road-stained riding clothes, and so forth; but he was immensely flattered, and, as soon as he was sufficiently composed, the two girls asked, as a particular favour, to see the skeleton of the baby. This little stroke of tact banished all thought of the Countess, for it added dignity not only to the house but to the town that the fame of the skeleton should be acknowledged by the Hall. With much coyness and mock-modesty Mr. Passmore unlocked a cupboard and drew from its depths a small bundle. Then the veil (an old bandana handkerchief) was lifted, and the masterpiece was placed in Lady Euphemia's hands. After due tribute of wonder and reverence she passed it on to Lady Bridget, who laid it, as though it had been the complete human article in long clothes, upon her arm, and chucked it under the chin; and then it went the round of the company, all of whom had seen it a dozen

times, but, with such an example before them, contrived to find something new to admire. With appetites thus whetted, the guests passed into the dining-room for refreshment; and presently the coach, fully repaired, rolled up to the door. The housekeeper and the tiring-maids had received as much honour in their own sphere as the young ladies in theirs, so all were in good temper. The two girls took leave of the company with much grace, and embraced Mrs. Passmore with a cordiality that sent her into the seventh heaven. The whole town turned out to see them depart, even as it had assembled to witness their arrival; the family coach rumbled away eastward; so ended a great day in the annals of Driverton.

II

Not many weeks later the upper ranks of society in that centre of culture and intellect underwent a succession of three staggering shocks. The first was the news that the bailiffs had taken possession of Squire Pike's house, and the second, which came simultaneously with it, was the tidings that the Countess Fagottina had abducted Mr. Courtenay, and that both had left the district in company and in secret. Lurid details as to

the past life of the Countess, which gradually drifted across Dartmoor from Stonehouse into Driverton, left no doubt that Mrs. Passmore had made a correct estimate of her character. Lizzie regarded the matter with singular complacency; and her mother comforted herself at the outset with the reflection that, after overhearing Mr. Courtenay's eulogy of the Countess on the day of the great party in her own parlour, she had utterly dismissed him from her mind as a possible son-in-law. Moreover, as it chanced, consolation of a very different kind was laid up for her; and this was the third and the greatest of the shocks which overtook Driverton at this eventful time. It came upon the town after a gentle premonition. Mrs. Odam, the monthly nurse, while conversing in the streets with another lady, had been overheard by at least five credible auditors to say that in all her thirty years' experience of an interesting profession she had never met with a parallel case. "I couldn't have belaved it, Mrs. Crang; I couldn't have belaved it," were her words, as she turned back to impress the marvel upon her friend by a final shot at long range; and they echoed along the astonished High Street. Such a mystery called for immediate exploration and inquiry; and before evening the entire town was

in possession of the facts. They were of such a nature that the excitement could not wholly die down before a date which could only be approximately fixed; and meanwhile there was only a temporary distraction from it when one day Lady Euphemia and Lady Bridget rode in to call upon Mrs. Passmore, and Lady Bridget informed her, for she wished her to hear the news from no lips but her own, that she was engaged to be married to Lord Torbay. The months rolled on, and one morning the town woke up to hear that Mrs. Passmore had gained the wish of her heart, that she had given birth to a boy and was doing as well as could be expected.

The good apothecary was overwhelmed with congratulations. He rode but a short round on the afternoon of the great day, but, as it chanced, he met his lordship on the road, who stopped him to inquire after the health of Mrs. Passmore. Then, with some shyness, he imparted to his lordship the intelligence with which his heart was bursting. Whereupon, to his boundless surprise, the great man answered him with, "Then it's Passmore and Son from to-day, is it? Now, look ye, Mr. Passmore, you must let me stand godfather to your little man. Don't call him after me, mind, at any rate for his first name;

let him be Job, like his father, and I hope he may grow up to be as good a man." And his lordship nodded, smiling under his tall white hat, pressed his left leg into the side of his brown hack, turned through a gate which his groom was holding open for him, and cantered away, leaving the apothecary dumb with amazement and pride. Mr. Job assured all his patients that afternoon of a speedy recovery.

In due time there arrived a silver cup, engraved with the initials " J. P.," and, a few days before the christening, there came further a shoulder and breast of venison. The choice of this joint had been a matter of earnest debate in his lordship's family for some days. Lady Bridget had suggested a haunch ; but Lady Euphemia had objected that there might be difficulty in cooking it in Mr. Passmore's kitchen, and her ladyship had upheld the objection, thinking also in her secret heart that the gift of a haunch carried with it undue social distinction and might cause jealousies. The haunch, therefore, was ruled out ; and the three then fell to discussion of the respective merits and demerits of a fore-quarter, a neck, and a shoulder and breast. But, finding that little progress was made towards a decision, her ladyship without mentioning any names called in the housekeeper, who pointed out that, if

necessary, the breast could be cut away from the shoulder and the two cooked separately, so as to suit the dimensions of any kitchen. So a groom rode into Driverton with a basket containing a shoulder and breast for Mr. Passmore, and other matters to be left with certain of the poor ; and Lizzie, in the fulness of her heart, plied the groom so heartily with cider that the lad dropped the hartshorn and oil, which had been intended for rheumatic old Geordie Muxworthy, with the mother of a sick child, and left Mrs. Geordie preparing to rub her husband's shoulders with some sweet jelly. The arrival of the venison, however, caused a profound sensation in Driverton; and on the day of the christening feast the fumes of the delicacy attracted nearly as many to the back of the apothecary's house as the arrival of the guests attracted to the front. Mr. Passmore put forth the whole of his anatomical skill in carving for the company ; and the air with which he exclaimed, " Mrs. Bendle, let me give 'ee just another little bit of his lordship's venison ! " was irresistible. Indeed the slanderous tongues of the uninvited proclaimed that the apothecary had given this banquet merely because he was overstocked with drugs. But it was generally agreed that the proceedings at large were worthy of so great an

occasion ; and it was noticed that when, towards the close, an old and privileged guest sat evidently expecting that the apothecary would, as usual, produce his masterpiece, Mr. Passmore gave a jolly laugh and said : " No ! no more skeleton now we have a rale baby in the house."

THE WHITE WITCH TO SCRATTON

I

"And if any man honger, let mun ate at hoom; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. Yurr endeth the second lesson. I publish the banns of marriage betwane Abram Mooggeridge, bachelor, and Mary Bussell, spinster, booth of these parish. If any of yu know just cause or 'pediment why these tu persons may not be joined together in holy matrimony ye are to declare it. This is the first time of asking. Lord now lettest thy servant depart in peace——"

Thus in one breath did the parson of Brimblecombe gabble through the afternoon service in the hideous little whitewashed church of that parish, having in like fashion gabbled through the morning service in the not far distant and equally hideous little church of Brinford in the forenoon. He was not looking his best on that

fine September afternoon some eighty years ago, for he was a hoary-headed old reprobate who was generally drunk on Saturday nights, and on the preceding Saturday night had been drunker than usual. Nor was the male congregation of Brimblecombe looking its best either, for most of them also had been drunk on the previous day. Brimblecombe, a lonely moorland village, was in fact a disreputable little place, blessed with no resident gentleman of high station to set a standard of decency, and had for years been cursed with a dissolute parson of the worst description. Its traditions were of lawlessness, smuggling and poaching; and the days of the annual fair, or "revels," which was the one break in the monotony of the year, were about the very worst of the three hundred and sixty-five. They were just over; and the heads of all Brimblecombe men were aching, and their digestions disordered. Yet the church was full; and assuredly this was not due to the attractions of the minister.

The revels, in fact, still preserved the old manly pastime of wrestling matches, which were their one redeeming feature. But even the wrestling was rather brutal, for kicking was not barred in North Devon, and special boots, for protective not less than aggressive purposes, were worn by

the wrestlers. The prize offered was two or three silver spoons ; and it was a time-honoured custom that the victor should always present himself in church upon the ensuing Sunday with the spoons in his hat, for all the congregation to gaze upon and admire. That was the reason why Abram Muggeridge, not the most regular of worshippers, was in church that day. For the second year in succession he had thrown Luke Webber, until then the acknowledged and invincible champion of Brimblecombe ; and thereby he had wrested from Luke not only silver spoons but the hand of Mary Bussell, who, courted by both men, had told Abram that, if he prevailed against Luke for the second time, he might see that the parson " axed their names in church " without further delay.

A proud man was Abram when he left the church in his suit of black broadcloth, with a flaming necktie, both in colour and design, and the spoons conspicuous in the band of the tall black hat which he had inherited from his father. He was a fair man with fine silky hair, honest grey eyes, and not a bad face, when he had not been drinking. He was short and sturdy in all his limbs, immensely broad and very deep ; but with all his apparent clumsiness he was very

quick on his legs ; and this gift, added to a complacent temper, had given him the better of Luke Webber, who was both the taller and the heavier man. Luke had not been in church ; and all who knew him guessed that he was sulking and drinking heavily. So Abram had the admiring looks of every maid in Brimblecombe upon him, and if one of them (who had entertained vain hopes of him) tossed her head in simulated contempt, there was no mistaking the pride in the eyes of Mary Bussell. Any stranger would have picked out Mary as the most striking girl, outwardly, in all the village. She was very tall and upright, towering well above " little Abram," as he was affectionately called, with a superb figure, regular and finely cut features, rather a narrow face, sallow complexion, thin lips, resolute mouth, and formidable black eyes. Possibly she threw back to some Spanish ancestor, for tradition says that not a few wrecked men of the Spanish Armada gained the Exmoor shore of the Bristol Channel ; but in any case she presented a strange contrast with Saxon Abram.

Now it so happened that two men besides Luke Webber were aggrieved by Abram's engagement to Mary. One was Jimmy Pugsley, the village idiot, who, as is the way of his kind, had

taken a desperate fancy, in his animal fashion, to Mary. The other was old Lewis Webber, uncle to Luke, who was his heir. Lewis owned a house and a small farm upon ground neighbouring to Brimblecombe, and was known as "the white witch to Scratton." The attributes of a white witch are not very definite, but they generally include some knowledge, intuitive and other, of herbal and veterinary art, and the possession of the evil eye, or, in the language of Devon, the power of "overlooking." Now, old Lewis Webber, though advanced in years, was not exempt from human passions, and, being attracted by Mary, had occasionally addressed to her endearing epithets which were not in the best taste; and Mary had answered him not merely with indignant scorn, though she was far from despising his powers of witchcraft, but with threats that she knew some one, Abram to wit, who would give the white witch "what vor," if she bade him do so.

Thus these three had a grievance in common; and singularly enough they were already allies. A white witch, let the sceptical deride him as they may, is never quite an ordinary man, though credulity may endow him with greater powers than he would care to claim; and old Lewis Webber was gifted with remarkable influence over

the insane. Jimmy Pugsley, so far as his intellectual powers extended, was his obedient slave; and—whether the fact were due to old Lewis or not—Jimmy was also greatly subservient to Luke, who made use of him as a poaching companion, wherein his low cunning was serviceable, and as a beast of burden.

For some days after the revels both Luke and Jimmy disappeared, not a little to the relief of Mary; and it was with real happiness that she awaited the coming of her wedding day. Abram arranged matters with the parson, who, after making sure that his fees would be forthcoming—"one shillin' each axing, and dree and six for the marryin'"—professed himself eager to meet their convenience on any day before noon. This done, Abram walked thirteen miles into Tawbridge to buy the ring, and, for the first time in his life, returned perfectly sober. The happy day came. Bride, bridegroom and relations went to church. Abram broke down in trying to write his name on the register and had to content himself with a straggling mark; Mary, without any affectation of scholarship, wrote a fairly neat cross; the disreputable old parson scrawled a shaking and unsightly signature; and it was left to the clerk to make good the missing names of all and sundry

in his best commercial hand. Then the party left the church, and on debouching from it on to a tiny village square found a little group awaiting them.

The most conspicuous was a little blue-eyed old man, with a cherub's face, flanked by wings of soft tow-like white hair, under a very tall black hat. He wore a dark blue plush coat and waistcoat, the former deep skirted, the latter long flapped, with white metal buttons, fustian breeches and gaiters ; and he was mounted on the rump of a white ass with one eye. This was the white witch of Scratton, a figure who would have attracted attention in any company. Next to him was Jimmy Pugsley, with the rolling, vacant eye, slabbering lips and lolling tongue that are characteristic of his kind ; and next to him again was Luke Webber, a tall, powerful, broad-shouldered man, with an inclination to stoop which suggested one accustomed to carry heavy burdens. He was strikingly handsome, with curly chestnut hair reaching below his ears, light moustache and straggling whiskers, aquiline nose, and a fine, strong jaw. The face was spoiled by the eyes, which were small, brown, and close together, with a general spirit in them of suspicion and sulkiness. Just now they were rather bloodshot,

and his face was pasty, with other indications that he had been drinking hard. He smiled upon the couple, however, and said with a certain heartiness, "Gude luck to 'ee, Abram." The idiot gaped and grinned and made an unintelligible noise, while his eyes devoured Mary. The old man smiled like a baby and piped out shrilly, "Gude luck to 'ee, Abram; gude luck to 'ee, Mary, my dear. Shall I tell 'ee your fortin? Yu shall bear a fine boo'ee, but he won't favour his father."

"Then who will he favour?" demanded Abram, half in jest, but with a hint of defiance and of coming wrath.

"He'll be a butiful boo'ee," the old man piped on with provoking prolixity, "but he won't favour his father. He'll favour one of us three 'ere."

"Not Luke!" cried Abram angrily, eyeing his former rival with a dangerous glare.

"Noo, not Luke," answered the old man calmly.

"Whu then?" demanded Abram. "Not yu! That would be a poor job," he added sarcastically.

"Noo, not me," replied old Lewis, with exasperating slowness. "Now can you guess whu 'tis?" and he looked with a bland smile at Jimmy Pugsley.

" Bah ! yu'm drunk, maister," retorted Abram scornfully. " 'Tis time yu went 'oom. And I tell 'ee what it is, maister," he added, with rising wrath, " if yu wasn't so old a man, I'd drow 'ee over the 'aitch, and your donkey after 'ee, aye, and Jimmy after him. I cude *du* it." And with gleaming eyes he braced himself up in the proud consciousness of strength, as though he meant to begin work at once.

"Come, Abram, come," pleaded Mary. "Don't heed what he saith." She had turned very white, and her hand trembled upon Abram's arm.

" Aye, goo," said old Lewis, with a chuckle ; " don't 'ee heed what I say. Yu'll call my words to mind one day, and 'tis all one to me whether folks belave them or no. Gude-bye to 'ee, Mary, my dear." And he turned his donkey, struck it with the ash-plant which he carried in his hand, and trotted sniggering away. The idiot shambled out of sight, and Luke Webber, with a surly smile, turned off in a different direction and disappeared. Abram, still growling, was led away by Mary, and they walked away to the wedding feast. But both felt that their wedding day had been spoiled for them.

II

They took a solitary cottage at the very end of the village where they were a little detached from all neighbours, and there, for a short time, they were left in peace. They saw nothing of the white witch, little of Luke Webber, who seemed to be constantly employed at a distance, and little at first of Jimmy Pugsley, though he never took his eyes off Mary if they chanced to meet. She now felt a horror of him which she had never felt before, though she had been accustomed to see and to laugh at him all her life. Then, after she had been married about two months, she became conscious that the idiot was continually watching her. In the morning, as soon as Abram had gone out to work, his hideous face appeared somewhere, and his eye fixed her with a vacant stare. If she slipped her feet into her pattens and clinked down the road with her pitcher to the spring, his face showed itself either openly in the road, or looking over a gate, or peering at her through a hedge. Many times she drove him off, but he always returned. She appealed to Abram, but Abram, though he threatened to thrash him, could never catch him. Jimmy had no regular habits and was not easy

ANDOVER PUBLIC LIBRARY CENTRAL

to find ; and supposing that he had caught him, village opinion would probably have turned against Abram if he had punished the wretched creature severely ; for, unless he thieves, or makes himself otherwise offensive, the village idiot is somewhat of a privileged mortal. And Mary, knowing that motherhood was awaiting her, remembered the words of the white witch and trembled.

For five months from her marriage she endured the silent persecution ; and then chance gave them the opportunity of moving. A yeoman, one Brockhole, who called himself a squire, not far from Brimblecombe, wanted a man to look after his shooting ; and Abram, offering himself for the place, was accepted. They moved into another cottage on Brockhole's land, isolated, though standing on an old by-road, and hoped that they were free from their burden. Brockhole himself was an easy-going creature, rather full of his own importance and of the antiquity of his family, rather too fond of being a great man among the small farmers whose company he frequented, and rather given to drink. But he was a kindly fellow enough, and they trusted that they would be happy in his service. Yet they had not been there a day before the idiot

presented himself as before, never speaking but always watching, and taking care that Mary should see him. Worst of all, Brockhole encouraged him, thinking it the lordly thing to patronise the creature, engage him with conversation which he conceived to be facetious, and chuck him a copper or two. The latter state was almost worse than the first.

She was within a month of her delivery when one morning Abram told her that he would be out all day ferreting with the squire, who had asked a party of farmers to enjoy the sport with him. She saw the party of loud young fellows swagger past her cottage with their guns, and envied them their wealth—great compared with her own—and their leisure. She heard shots all the morning, then a pause, evidently for luncheon, then a single shot only; and shortly afterwards she heard heavy steps on the road and looked out. The shooting party was returning. Four men, three of them labourers, were carrying a gate on which lay the body of Squire Brockhole, his clothes soaked with blood and his ghastly face stamped with the mark of coming death. His eyes were closed, and at each heavy breath bubbles of blood rose and burst upon his lips. Behind the gate followed two of the shooters,

both nearly as pale as the squire, and one of them weeping with the long hysterical whines of a distraught and exhausted child. Abram was not with the party; and for a moment she was terrified by a deadly fear that he was answerable for the disaster, and had fled. She could not find words to ask what had happened, nor, indeed, could any of the party have found words to answer her, for all had marks of tears on their cheeks, the helpless tears shed by helpless rustics in the presence of any physical catastrophe. She staggered back into the house, half fascinated, half repelled by the vision of the face that she had seen upon the gate, and, turning to close the door, perceived Jimmy Pugsley peering over the hedge at the dismal procession. Before she could close it, he had caught her eye and greeted her with his broad, inhuman grin.

What then came upon her of pain and of terror she hardly knew; but at last after long hours of agony Abram returned, looking paler than she had ever seen him. Yet it seemed that he had hardly been with her for more than a few minutes when he dashed out again at the sound of wheels passing in the dark. And then came in a strange gentleman whom she had never seen before; very helpful and comforting

he was; and then came in a neighbour, Mrs. Radworthy, mother of many, from Brimblecombe, and then, after what had seemed interminable absence, Abram himself. All this was as a waking dream to her through long hours of agony and the horror of a great darkness.

What had happened was this. The shooting party had drunk heavily at luncheon, and, on taking their places to ferret a bank at its close, had made an hilarious agreement to ignore the only safe rule, namely, never to shoot at a rabbit on the bank, but to wait until he comes down to the level ground. The first rabbit that bolted had run along the top of the bank; a young farmer had fired at it, and the entire charge had struck Brockhole, who was on the other side, out of his place, but invisible owing to the top-growth, full in the chest at a range of a few yards.

There was nothing very novel about the accident — for nothing will cure some men of carelessness with firearms—but naturally it struck terror into all present. With the exception of Abram, every soul lost his head; and the abject panic of the man who had fired the fatal shot, and saw visions of himself upon the gallows, was pitiful to see. It was Abram who unhung the gate and bade the others carry the wounded man

home, and it was Abram who took the mare, that had brought up the luncheon, out of the shafts, stripped her of all but her bridle, jumped on her back and galloped into Tawbridge for a doctor. He covered the thirteen miles in five-and-thirty minutes, and the mare dropped down under him before the doctor's door, and there died. But the doctor was out, and no one could say when he would come in; and after a short wait of hopeless impatience Abram was fain to turn and walk home, where he found Mary to all appearances dying. Then hearing the sound of wheels, he had guessed that it must be the doctor on his way to Squire Brockhole, and had run after him to beg his assistance. The doctor had bidden him summon the village midwife, and had then quickly returned to the cottage, for the wounded Brockhole had died before his aid could reach him, and a living baby is better than a dead squire.

At last the trouble was over. The doctor looked the baby over critically by the light of a candle, noted the misshapen head, and said, half to himself and half to Mrs. Radworthy, "Hum! not the kind of child to be expected herefrom, though he is a month before his time. There's one too many of this sort in Brimblecombe

already. Abram Mooggeridge," he went on gruffly, " come here and see your boy."

" Does he favour me ? " asked Abram, half mechanically.

" No, he doesn't," answered the doctor abruptly, but not unkindly ; " come and see for yourself."

And Abram took the candle and looked for himself, with tightened lips.

" You've not been drinking since you married, Abram ? " said the doctor. " Tell me the truth, now."

" No, God strike me dead if I lie to 'ee, sir ; I haven't had a drop too much since last revels."

" I believe you," said the doctor. " You don't look like it. What's your missus been about now all this time ? "

" She's lived yurr as quite as quite," answered Abram ; " I've done all that I cude for her," he added rather huskily, " but I culdn't keep that beggarin' Jimmy Pugsley from watchin' her and vollyin' her all day when I was out to work."

" Yas, 'tis Jimmy that he favours. I was wonderin' who 'twas," put in Mrs. Radworthy sweetly, with no evil intent, but with the rustic love of making the worst of things. " Any one would think 'twas Jimmy's boy and not yours, Abram."

"Hold your tongue, woman," said the doctor roughly, thereby probably saving Mrs. Radworthy from instant death at Abram's hands. "Keep quiet, Abram. Is Jimmy Pugsley that half-baked boy in the village? The baby's as like me as him. But I tell you frankly, Abram, that your boy isn't like to live, and perhaps better so, for, if he does live, he'll come to no good. It's best to tell you the truth, though it's hard upon your poor missus here. But mind, she's very ill. You must keep her very quiet. I've told Mrs. Radworthy here what to do, and, please God, she'll get well and give you so fine a young man as yourself next time. Now, I tell 'ee, Abram" —here he dropped into the vernacular,—"keep yourself quite and keep the missus quite, and all will be well."

"The boy's a-witched," burst out Abram; "'tis the white witch to Scratton——"

"Now, didn't I tell 'ee to be *quite*, Abram?" said the doctor, smiling, "and you'm beginning to holly as if your missus wasn't in the next room. Get along with 'ee and your a-witching. 'Tis old wives' tales, not fit for the man that throw'd Luke Webber. Rin out now and wake up my lad; I've thirteen miles to drive hoom."

And Abram ran out into the rain, woke up the

sleeping groom, and saw the gig brought round with its two staring lamps.

"Now keep *quite*, Abram," said the doctor again, as he took his watch out of his pocket; "half-past five o'clock! Don't do nothing foolish, Abram," he went on as he turned up his collar. "Good morning to 'ee"; and he tucked the apron round his knees, took the reins from the lad's hands and the whip from the bucket. "Go on, Polly." He nodded over his shoulder as his bay pony sprang into her collar and trotted off.

Abram watched until the light of the gig had vanished round a corner, and then came in with compressed lips and took his hat.

"Where be gwine?" asked Mrs. Radworthy.

"'Way to Scratton," he answered; "I'm going to spake with the white witch."

"Now why can't 'ee bide quite at 'oom, as the doctor told 'ee?" protested Mrs. Radworthy, not relishing the prospect of being left alone with her patient. "Didn't he tell 'ee to keep quite?"

"And didn't he tell yu to hold your tongue?" answered Abram, exasperated beyond endurance. "I'm going to Scratton, I tell 'ee," and he closed the door softly and was gone.

It was a wet, cheerless morning, blowing half a gale from the south-west, with squalls that

eddied and beat fiercely down on the muddy road, and it was still quite dark ; but Scratton lay to north, not more than four miles away, and with a wind that was more or less fair Abram, half walking, half running, covered the distance in little more than forty minutes. Scratton, a miserable tumble-down house, lay just off the road, half-way down a little combe, with its wretched buildings behind it. It wore, at its best, the neglected aspect of a dwelling whose owner was too poor, or too avaricious, to spend a penny upon it. As he laid aside the miserable wreck of a garden gate, Abram noticed with some surprise that a light was burning in both the upper and the lower stories. He bent low as he climbed the steep ascent to the door, and then straightening himself struck two sharp knocks.

A heavy step sounded instantly within, and the door was opened by Luke Webber, who held a guttering candle near Abram's face, and said, not too civilly, " Well, Abram, and why be yu come yurr avor the day ? "

Abram cleared his throat and answered shortly, " I want to zee maister partic'lar."

" Yu might ha' waited until we was ready and the neighbours come to zee mun——" grumbled Luke.

"I tell 'ee, I want to zee maister partic'lar," rejoined Abram. "'Tis maister's 'ouse, I reckon, and I want to zee mun 'tonce and partic'lar."

Luke scowled at him for a moment, and then a new light seemed to dawn upon him and he smiled wickedly. "Well," he said slowly, "if you want to zee mun partic'lar, I reckon you must zee mun"; and he led the way up a creaking narrow stair, threw open a door at the top, and uttered the ironical welcome, "Plaze to come right in."

The room was long, narrow, low and filthy, under the rafters; and at the far end, on the inside, was a narrow dirty bed, covered with a patchwork quilt. On a rickety chair standing by it stood a guttering candle, its coarse wick throwing out a feeble yellow flame.

"Maister," said Abram loudly, advancing, and then stopped. On the bed lay the body of old Lewis Webber, fully dressed in the usual blue plush coat and waistcoat. It was lying on its back. The cherubic face was white and waxy, the long wings of white hair nestled happily on each side of it, and the features wore a faint smile as of a happy, dreaming child. On one white metal button, near his collar, the yellow light of the candle blazed like a star.

" Lord save us ! " murmured Abram under his breath ; " is he dade, then ? " he asked aloud.

" Dade he is," assented Luke, in a voice of some triumph. " Yu can call mun again, if yu've a mind ; he won't answer."

Abram was silent for a moment. " Then I reckon I be come tu late," he said, as if to himself.

" I reckon yu be," answered Luke, " and I tell 'ee that now this is *my* 'ouse."

Abram hesitated for a moment, and realised that Luke had the right of him. He turned and went heavily down the stair, to meet in the parlour at its foot a hideous old female figure, dirty and unkempt, the housekeeper of the deceased white witch.

" Why, Abram," said the old crone, in a kind of hoarse, whining whisper, " you shude ha' waited till I got mun laid out proper. I gave mun his dinner yesterday, and he ate hearty ; and then he sat down in thiccy chair by the vire and valled asleep, as he did every day. And I was with mun in the room all the afternoon, a-mending his stockings I was, and I never heard mun goo. 'Twasn't till four o'clock that I called to mun, but he didn't answer naught. So then I went up and tiched mun, and he was cold—so

cold as a stone, he was. And I never heard mun goo—went off like a lamb, he did——"

But Abram broke away without hearing more, and strode swiftly down the steep garden path towards the road. As he passed the rickety gate and turned round to prop it up against its rotten post, he saw Luke shut the front door and heard him bolt it; and then from an upper window there came a faint cackle, and, looking up, he saw the face of the idiot, looking ghastly white under the first faint light of coming dawn, with his eyes rolling and his hideous mouth opened wide from ear to ear. Abram sprang back two steps and shook his fist. "Yu damned grinning ——" he screamed, "if I catch 'ee, by God, I'll kill 'ee!" But the face had gone from the window. The lights were extinguished both above and below; and the aspect of the silent damp wall recalled only a house of the dead. He turned down again into the road and began to fight his way back against wind and rain to his own cottage.

He was feeling weary now, strong man though he was. He had not tasted food since the previous morning; he had seen Squire Brockhole killed; he had ridden thirteen miles at headlong speed on a bare-backed horse; he had walked back those same thirteen miles, mostly uphill, to find his

wife at death's door ; and he had walked another ten miles since on various errands. The four miles homeward from Scratton in the teeth of the weather were trying. The rain beat through the sleeves and shoulders of his coat ; and his fustian breeches clung damp against his thighs and knees. When at length he reached his door, Mrs. Radworthy met him in great agitation.

" She's callin' for the baby, Abram," she cried breathlessly, " and say what I will to keep her off, she keep's callin' and callin'. I reckon yu must take mun to her, Abram ; though the doctor said no. She's terrible wake, and she'll die else."

A feeble voice called his name from within. The light was stronger now, and showed Mary lying with closed eyes, her face thin and drawn and ghastly white amid the loose locks of her long black hair.

" Bring mun to me, Abram," she said feebly, still with closed eyes.

" Well, Mary, I reckon——" he stammered.

" Bring mun to me, Abram," she repeated wearily ; and he went out without a word, and brought the baby in.

" Show mun to me," she said ; and he held the wretched little creature in his two great hands, as if it had been a piece of meat, to the

level of her face. She opened two wild weary eyes and gazed at it long, while he moved it gently from time to time so that the light of the window might fall upon every part of it.

"Jimmy Pugsley," she said at length; and she closed her eyes again and lay still.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

I. Sunday in a Country Church

It is a typical Devonshire day, soft, grey, damp, and warm, though the New Year is but just come in. The church is a kind of cruciform barn with a square battlemented tower, in which five bells, all out of tune, are ringing a furious peal. Suddenly the peal ceases and gives place to a single bell—the parson's bell, which sounds the number of days in the month; and, as these are not many, let us hasten in. The interior is as plain as the outside: all whitewash, transparent leaded panes, and high, stiff-backed pews, above which rises the old-fashioned "three-decker." At the western end is a gallery for the choir, and in the two tiny transepts are two more galleries, the one occupied by his lordship and his family and the other by his female servants. All woodwork is painted putty-colour; but, as this is Christmas-time, a hole has been bored at a yard's

interval along the top of every pew, and a tiny sprig of holly has been inserted therein. These are our Christmas decorations. For the rest, the centre of the church is occupied by a stove, and the seating has been so contrived that the eyes of the entire congregation shall converge upon that stove, and gaze over it upon each other. It is a most convenient arrangement, for every one can see what every one else is wearing and doing. The rustic men are all in black broadcloth, which they have worn, together with the tall hats now comfortably hidden under the seat, on Sundays for the best part of their lives. Their ladies are also, for the most part, in black, with large bonnets and ample shawls. Only a few of the girls show a little colour, for, within the memory of men now present, the late lord's lady used to stand at the church door and bid such giddy maidens as ventured to flaunt a ribbon to cast aside the accursed thing, as they valued their salvation.

The parson, a lithe, spare, rather tall man, with a shock of grizzled hair and short grey whiskers, is standing by the altar rails, over which hang his surplice, hood, scarf, and gown. The clerk gives him a hand into his surplice; hood and scarf are donned in a twinkling. The

two move to their places in the three-decker and shut the doors, amid much fidgeting in the western gallery; and then two fiddles, a flute, a flageolet, and a bass-viol make a sudden and irregular attack, and the choir bursts into "I will arise—I will arise and goo tu my vather"—an anthem with which they have begun the service for years. Neither instruments nor voices are very well together, nor is the intonation very perfect; but what of that? Let them plod along, each of them in his own time, and reach the goal in their own way. The bass-viol, always a laggard, comes in last with a heart-rending groan; and the performer, a huge man with voluminous whiskers and long hair, shifts his bow to his left hand and mops his forehead. The flute wipes his instrument with his sleeve; the flageolet wipes his lips with the same; and the first violin clears his throat—and something more—with great heartiness. His lordship's three schoolboy sons, who have been waiting for these final demonstrations, nudge each other and beam approval upon the performers, all of whom are in his lordship's employ and very dear friends.

Meanwhile a party of worshippers in black, filling two whole pews, has remained kneeling throughout, and one man among them, who

instinctively stood up, has been sternly pulled down again by a very stout lady. This is as it should be. This party were all mourners at a funeral last week, and it is their bounden duty to attend church on the ensuing Sunday and to kneel from the beginning of the service to the end. Then the parson begins to read, and most admirably he does so; for the old-fashioned country parson was worthy of beautiful English. He speaks with a touch of Devonshire, but there is no mistaking him for anything but a cultivated gentleman. And the clerk leads the responses in his broadest dialect, treading very close upon the parson's heels when it comes to the alternate verses of the Psalms, and ending each prayer with something that sounds like "Ha-a-a-mun."

As to the lessons, an admiring parishioner has declared that "a lesson from pa'son be as gude as a zarmon from other men," so perfect is the reading. He has the knack of picking up passage after passage by a mere glance at the book, and he looks all round the church as he delivers them, giving the impression that he has found something interesting and weighty to impart, and would fain share it with all his hearers. After the second lesson, there is a feeling that the usual routine is to be broken. Parson and clerk leave

PUBLIC CENTRAL

their boxes and move to the vicinity of the stove, where the font stands. The three schoolboys look at each other in despair. There is a baptism ! Well, facts must be accepted ; and the only resource is to exchange sympathetic glances with the village lads opposite to and below them. But the village lads must be wary, for the sexton hovers about with a cane, whose snapping has already been heard more than once since the service began.

At last the parson has the infant in his arms. With a prudence taught by many baptisms, he dexterously doubles the long skirt back over the baby's feet to his own elbow, and says : " Name this child." Dead silence follows ; while a stalwart gossip turns very red and seems unable to articulate. " Spake, mun, spake," admonishes the clerk. " 'Lias," ejaculates the gossip in a husky roar. So Elias is duly christened without a murmur (for all babies are quiet with this parson), and acknowledges the fact by stretching out a tiny arm and touching the parson's nose. The schoolboys grin with delight ; but the parson's voice breaks and halts for a second before he recovers himself. His three children were all swept away some years ago by diphtheria within a fortnight, so he is left with none ; and every father and mother in the parish remembers it

with sympathy. However, the break is but momentary, and the service proceeds to the first hymn. Now our hymn-book contains but one hundred and seventy-six hymns and about fifty metrical versions of the Psalms ; but one and all of them are good and worthy, and they are many of them sung to quaint old tunes which in the twentieth century are no longer heard. The clerk gives out the number loudly and sententiously. Choir and orchestra attack the hymn with vigour ; the bass-viol (who, having paused to spit on his bowing hand, is a little late) following his colleagues about half a beat in the rear. The whole congregation joins in, and thus becomes warmed up in due time for the second hymn ; for beyond an anthem and two hymns our music has no desire to go.

Then clerk and parson adjourn to the altar-rails. The surplice is doffed ; the black gown is put on. The clerk returns to his box, and the parson ascends a long stair to the pulpit. Here he is overlooked by his lordship's gallery ; and he is perfectly aware that the three schoolboys are earnestly calculating the number of pages in his manuscript. But he has another service to take yet in a parish five miles away, and will not keep them long. So he gives out his text, "God saw that it was good," and discourses briefly of the

difference between good work and bad, eliciting approving nods from blacksmith, carpenter, tailor, cobbler, labourer, farmer, and farmer's wife, for he knows their merits and their failings, and is a pretty good judge of the work of all of them.

So the service ends, and all wait to greet him at the church door. He knows all the children by their Christian names, and has a friendly word for all their parents. Meanwhile, the three schoolboys are gathered round his pony, which has been brought out to await him—a bay mare, just fourteen hands two inches high, with a significant scar on the knee of her near foreleg. They know her pedigree—sire a thoroughbred, dam an Exmoor pony—and her history: how she ran away with a trap, kicked it to pieces, blemished herself for ever, and was sold for fifteen sovereigns by her terrified owner to the parson, who would not now take fifty for her. His reverence rarely allows himself more than one day's hunting a week; but, when hounds run straight and fast across the moor, few can catch the parson on his pony. She swings her head impatiently towards him as he advances smiling to the boys; and the eldest asks him shyly if he will shoot with them next week. He accepts with pleasure, for he is a good shot and loves these boys. His lordship comes

up to clinch the arrangement, which indeed he has planned beforehand, desiring nothing better than that his sons may become as good sportsmen as the parson.

Then her ladyship takes him aside for a moment ; and his face softens, for she speaks to him of his wife. Her ladyship knows that the parson will not enjoy his day's shooting if he leaves his wife alone in the rectory, so she is arranging for her to be brought down to spend the day at the Hall, where few guests are more welcome. The carriage must be sent up to fetch her, and the exact hour must be fixed and religiously observed. For her ladyship, after the manner of the old school, is meticulous as to details, and is already revolving in her head the mission, or missions, in the way of dropping delicacies for the sick poor, that may be discharged by the carriage on the way to the rectory. In a few minutes all is satisfactorily settled. The parson raises his hat, strides up to the impatient pony, and, after a glance at bridle and girths, swings himself into the saddle. The youngest boy runs to open a gate for him into a field. His lordship descants to his first-born in a whisper on the perfection of the parson's seat on a horse. And then with a final salute away gallops his

reverence to another church, where there will be a similar service (except that the clerk will ascend the gallery and lead the hymns with a pitch-pipe), and he will be equally welcome to his congregation.

All this has long since passed away. The parson and his wife have joined their babies in the churchyard, and most of the congregation lie near them. His lordship and his lady rest in the family vault. The very schoolboys are portly grandfathers ; and the village lads, with whom they exchanged grins, are growing slow with age and rheumatism. The church has been " restored " ; the voice of the parish clerk is heard therein no more ; the village orchestra many years ago gave place to an asthmatic harmonium ; and our hundred and seventy-six good hymns have, alas ! made way for an unspeakable volume containing eight hundred and more, most of them poor and too many of them vulgar trash. All this may be styled progress, but there was a heartiness under the old order which is not to be found in the new, and I rejoice whenever I light upon an " unrestored " church, with all its primitive uglinesses of whitewash and putty-colour, and no glory but the red cushions on the several stages of the three-decker.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

II. A Village Cricket Club

Our village never really cared in the least for cricket. In the extreme south-west games have not the same attraction for rustics as in the south-east, possibly because a muggy climate discourages unnecessary exertion, and incessant rain invites only to serious occupation in the open air. For anything in the way of sport, from a stag-hunt to a rat-hunt, from "snatching" a salmon to taking a wasps' nest, the village lads would brave any weather, but there was no romance for them in throwing a ball, striking it, and running after it.

His lordship, however, had a large family of boys, as was the rule in those days; and, since most of them were at public schools and brimful of stories of the heroes of the day—how C. I. Thornton hit a ball over the pavilion at Lord's, and C. F. Buller did this and A. N. Hornby did that—their immediate companions became infected

with a spurious enthusiasm, and it was resolved to form the Northacott Cricket Club.

The members consisted almost exclusively of the men employed by his lordship in his house, stables and garden, who joined it mainly from attachment to "the young gentlemen." The schoolmaster was the honorary secretary, and his lordship accepted the presidency, which office carried with it the privilege, cheerfully accepted, of paying for everything. For though the good man cordially hated all games except whist, he rejoiced that his boys should make friends of all that lived about their home. The position of umpire was quietly assumed by the sergeant-major of the Yeomanry, a veteran lancer who had gone through both Sikh campaigns and the Indian Mutiny. His claim upon the post was that he had a son who, by his own account, was the greatest cricketer that ever lived. "You never saw my son play, sir, I suppose?" he would say. "Ah, sir, you never saw such a hitter. When my son goes to the wicket, the whole field reins back." The son's name, curiously enough, has left no mark on the annals of cricket; but, with such prestige behind him, the sergeant-major performed his functions with a dignity which forbade any dispute concerning his decisions.

The characteristics of all the players (the young gentlemen excepted) were the same. They were very quick-eyed, but very clumsy-fingered ; they were slow on their legs, had great muscular strength and shins of cast-iron. The exception was the schoolmaster's son, a long, callow youth who was reading for Holy Orders at some college. He was a shining light in every respect, for, though only a very mediocre performer, he had played in games wherein at least a certain standard of efficiency had been observed, and had witnessed a few good matches. Moreover, he actually wore a coloured cap and was the reputed possessor of a pair of white flannel trousers (the poor man had probably gone hungry for days to buy them), so that, had he not been a modest, quiet, sound-hearted fellow, he might have lorded it over his rustic peers. For, in addition to all other advantages, he could beyond cavil bowl round-arm. His only rival in this last accomplishment was one of the squire's sons, a midshipman, who was always prepared to oblige with any description of bowling at the shortest notice. The remainder all bowled underhand " grubs " of the most terrifying description at extreme speed.

In the matter of batting the players fell into two categories, the defensive or blockers, and the

offensive or sloggers, analogous to the pikemen and musketeers of which the infantry was composed before the invention of the bayonet. The ideal thing was that there should always be a blocker at one end and a slogger at the other, the function of the former being to keep up his wicket and of the latter to make runs; and there could be no dispute as to the excellence of this arrangement in theory. But in practice it was found that the blocker was generally averse from hard running, except in favour of some feeble stroke of his own, with the result that blockers and hitters not unfrequently ran each other out. On such occasions the two sometimes gave way to violent recrimination, for science and brute force are always and everywhere antagonistic to each other. Our best blocker, one Benny Gaydon, had only his right hand, having lost the left through an accident; but this defect abated not his blocking powers one jot. In the field it was something of a drawback; but Benny was, for a wonder, quick on his legs; and to see him spring in front of a hard drive to mid-on, stop it with his shins and then return it with all his strength to the bowler, was an education.

And here it must be observed that the essence of fielding in our club was that the ball must be

returned with the full force of the fieldsman's arm. He was free to fumble in picking it up, he was very free to drop catches ; but when at last he had hold of the ball the whole field with one voice would adjure him : "Dash it in, George." This peculiarity was due to the training of the schoolmaster, who, though he knew nothing of the game, thought it only due to his position to impart at least so much instruction. Thereby he certainly put a little life into the proceedings. Whether the distance were seven yards or seventy, the ball was dashed in, to the dire peril even of a protected wicket-keeper. Overthrows counted for a great deal in our games.

The cricket ground was a comparatively level piece of land in his lordship's deer-park, hard by a great clump of beech trees, which did duty as a pavilion. It was rather rough (for it never occurred to any one to fence the deer off it), and it was very dead, not being wholly guiltless of rushes ; but the club was fully satisfied that it was the finest (they might reasonably have claimed it for the prettiest) ground in the world. Hard by it, not too far to be reached by a great hit, ran a rapid trout stream, which was the scene of terrible struggles from time to time. More than once, when Northacott played Southacott, Gideon Hul-

land, the champion slogger of Southacott, drove a ball into the water, and the whole field rushed down to the bank and exhorted each other to jump in after it. For all were wearing their Sunday clothes in honour of the occasion, and every man, though content to spoil his neighbour's, was tender of his own. The young gentlemen, all too eager to jump in, were forcibly restrained. "What should us say to his lordship if they was drownded?"—and only after much argument, and in deference to his calling upon the great waters, was the midshipman allowed to wade in knee-deep and retrieve the ball, by which time Gideon and his partner had run eight.

Once the ball rolled into a wasps' nest, and a footman, who was the first to reach it, delegated to the hall-boy, who was backing him up, the task of taking it out. A heated altercation followed, and presently the entire eleven were on the spot, at a safe distance, all talking and gesticulating at once, till the parson hove in sight, fishing, and there was a rush to borrow his landing-net. Thus the ball was at last recovered, without many casualties; but meanwhile Gideon had run eleven.

Northacott, however, had also her champion in the person of Jack Skinner, a mighty slogger, with bushy whiskers and the strength of a Hercules.

Unfortunately Jack's ambition led him in the direction of efforts to hit a ball over the clump of beech trees, a feat beyond even his muscles. It is true that the ball took some time to come clattering down through the branches and bewildered the field a good deal as to where it would ultimately fall; but three, or at most four, runs were the extreme reward of such a stroke. Once, indeed, the ball lodged in a fork, not very high up, and the hostile eleven, like one man, laid hold of the branch and shook it as if they would have shaken it off. The ball, however, refused to be dislodged until a light, small boy was lifted up and perched on the branch, up which he crept warily until he had picked the ball out of the fork; the eleven meanwhile waiting below with outstretched arms to catch him if he fell. But, being a loyal Northacott lad, he did not throw his prize down, but put it in his pocket and descended slowly, amid the ravings of the hostile eleven and the applause of all good Northacott men; until, judging himself to be dangerously near to his enemies, he flung them the ball and took advantage of this diversion to drop from the tree and run for his life. Jack Skinner made a fabulous number of runs from that hit, and Northacott won a glorious victory.

PUBLIC LIBRARY

FIFTY YEARS AGO

III. Our Friend the Miller

Of all the companions of his lordship's boys, the best beloved was Bill Dufty, the miller. He came of an old yeoman family, and his father, the first to take on the mill, had been a highly respected person, sidesman in the parish church, and holder of diverse parochial offices ; and his lordship had made a great point of attending his funeral. But Bill did not inherit his father's serious nature. His appearance was rather disreputable, for he always wore bad clothes, was exceedingly untidy, and not too clean in his person. His mop of brown hair and his short beard also were unkempt ; but that did not prevent him from being exceedingly good-looking ; and no woman, not even of the highest station, could resist Bill's great blue eyes, with their long lashes. It is to be feared, indeed, that Bill played havoc with the hearts of the village girls ; but at last he ran away with the

head gamekeeper's daughter, who was the prettiest of them all, and then he settled down, first as a farmer and finally as his father's successor in the mill. Here a sprinkling of flour did much to disguise the shabbiness of his attire and his neglect of soap and water.

Loving sport above all things, he, in the declining years of his father-in-law, the gamekeeper, undertook many of his duties, such as keeping down rabbits, catching trout, and killing venison for the house; and thus he became a kind of unofficial member of his lordship's household. Had his lordship known that Bill was not above giving short weight, unless carefully watched, that he generally returned from market the worse for drink, and, indeed, was apt to indulge to excess in liquor whenever he could get it for nothing, and that he was an exceedingly accomplished poacher, he might not have encouraged his boys to make a companion of Bill; but whether he was aware of these things or not, he trusted Bill not to do the boys any real harm, and he was right.

As to the boys, they delighted in him, for Bill had great gifts. He was a beautiful fisherman, a good shot with fowling-piece or rifle, a good horseman, and could do anything that he pleased with

any animal. His sheep-dogs were marvellously trained, his cats were unlike the cats of other men, his horses seemed to know exactly what was required of them, even his ferrets showed an obedience rare in their kind. He was once obliged to get rid of a terrier on account of its invincible love of poaching, and took the animal five-and-twenty miles by train into a strange country as a gift to a friend. By ten o'clock at night the dog had returned to him, with bleeding feet and utterly exhausted, but happy in rejoining his master; and thenceforward no one had the heart to complain of his ravages. Of course, Bill was casual and careless in some ways, though very far from it in others. Thus, though his weapon for killing the deer was an antiquated muzzle-loading, straight-grooved rifle, charged with an old-fashioned round bullet and a leather patch, and not therefore very accurate, he never in his life shot a deer except in the head or neck. Once, when one of his lordship's boys came down with a hasty message that venison was wanted, he slipped a halter over the head of his thoroughbred mare, which had a young foal at foot, rode off to the park bare-backed, with the boy sitting behind him, and, after a little galloping, shot his buck through the brain at eighty yards from the mare's

back and with the boy still sitting behind him. This done, he dismounted, pulled the halter over the mare's head and let her go, when she very sedately walked back alone to her foal over some three-quarters of a mile of public road. Of course Bill had left the deer-park gate open for her, with the chance that his lordship's deer might get out and wander all over the country; but he cheerfully took this risk, which, after all, was his lordship's rather than his own; and fortunately no harm came of it.

Under Bill's tuition the boys learned a variety of useful things, all the more readily because he was very much of a boy himself, with singular personal charm, a certain love of mischief, and a ready and witty tongue. He taught them how to foul-hook a salmon, and how to "snatch" any fish with a noose of horse-hair, accomplishments which, highly illegal in England, often proved serviceable in other parts of the world. He taught them also how to tie flies, and how to patch up any old fishing-rod so as to throw those flies somehow. When they grew up, he never missed a day's covert-shooting with them; and they would place their guns in his hand sometimes for half an hour and let him kill their game for them—a privilege which he enjoyed

the more, since he seldom had a chance at pheasant or partridge, and of course held no game licence. In one matter alone Bill failed. He could not, for the life of him, kill a rocketing bird, and never, no doubt from want of practice, acquired the knack of doing so. In fact, he never got beyond the stage of following his rocketer with his gun over an arc of about one hundred and eighty degrees, and then firing a mile behind him. As Bill grew older, he would always accompany them partridge-shooting mounted on an old pony; for walking after partridges, never very plentiful in that country of steep hills, small enclosures and high banks thickly covered with brambles and scrub, is no work for an elderly man. He had a marvellous knack of finding a commanding position from which to mark — a very difficult matter in North Devon—and seemed to know by instinct in which direction the guns were working, though he could not see them. And he would stick to his post in the roughest weather, nor let a bird that was visible in any quarter escape his observation.

At lunch-time he always appeared in the right place at the right moment, for he himself always carried the food and drink in a pair of old-fashioned saddle-bags. After luncheon he was not very

efficient for an hour or two, for he had always found time to take refreshment at every farmhouse on his passage, and consumed a good deal of strong ale at luncheon itself. Thus for a time his vision became duplicated. He saw very large coveys and never a single bird ; but this wore off, and after an interval he was as bright as ever, and quite ready to finish the ale at the end of the day. Perhaps his favourite day was the first of October, when the " young gentlemen " would walk for miles along his lordship's marches, beyond which there were a number of small neighbours on the watch to snap up his stray pheasants. Had Bill been one of these neighbours himself he would possibly have snared every pheasant on his ground, from sheer love of the trapper's art, for he understood poaching thoroughly in all its branches ; but, as it was, he held everything to do with the " young gentlemen " to be sacred.

Time went on. The " young gentlemen " passed from youth to middle age. They wandered all over the world. Some of them married, some of them were killed in action, but there was generally at least one at home, and to him Bill attached himself in default of more. He grew old himself, but he did not change, grasping at every opportunity of sport, and apparently neglect-

ing the mill, which seemed to have the happy faculty of looking after itself and of thriving upon it. At last he was attacked by an internal complaint, and knew that his end was near. The first of October came round, and the one " young gentleman " at home decided sadly that it would be cruel to send Bill the usual invitation to accompany him. He started, therefore, without him, but on reaching a familiar commanding point he was hailed by a feeble voice, and there was Bill. He was a ghastly figure, livid, shrunk to a skeleton, and hunched up in the saddle, but he was riding a raw four-year-old colt, with a rusty racing snaffle and a pair of new reins nearly as broad and thick as traces. The animal had never heard a shot fired in its life, and those who saw him trembled to think what might happen to Bill if the creature were to shy or bolt. But Bill, weak as he was, seemed perfectly at home upon the beast ; and a glance showed that on this occasion Bill had girths to his saddle, appendages with which he had frequently dispensed in his younger days. The shooting party, master, guests and men, was not of a sentimental type, but hardly one of them could speak as they ran up, one after another, to press Bill's hand. He himself was so much enfeebled that he had

little voice left, but he pointed a shaking finger, and in a whisper told how a towered bird had fallen here, and a covey had pitched there ; nor would he go home until the last shot had been fired. Three weeks later he was carried to his grave amid much mourning, for Bill was every man's friend ; but the inconsolable mourner was his tailless sheep-dog.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

IV. Farmer Bill's Sale

Farmer Bill Dufty was moving from his farm to the village mill, and had therefore decided to sell his stock. Would the "young gentlemen" come up in the morning and help to sort out the said stock? Of course the "young gentlemen" would. They were always ready to help Farmer Bill at any time, and they, at any rate, knew all his horses, for they had taken charge of them and their carts many a time when carrying corn. As to the help that they could give, they shrewdly suspected that it would be confined to general eulogy of Farmer Bill's possessions and character at large, with an occasional sly bid (uttered in the vernacular) when purchasers seemed not to rise to the height of the occasion.

The sale was to begin at one o'clock. There was to be luncheon at noon, and, while the company were eating and drinking, the auctioneer

was to go the round of the pens. All, therefore, must be ready by noon ; and accordingly, soon after half-past nine, Mr. Raymond, aged sixteen, Mr. Alfred, Mr. Dick and Mr. David, aged respectively fifteen, fourteen and thirteen, set out to run the mile and a half that separates the Hall from Slapworthy Farm.

Arriving in the farmyard they find utter confusion, much dust, considerable heat (for it is a sultry August morning), and an electric atmosphere. Bill, though he has evidently begun to refresh himself early, is in a bad temper and is arguing violently with one of his underlings. The reason soon comes out. The sheep are to be sold in lots of six, wethers first and ewes next. Any ordinary man would have drafted his lots, penned them at once, and numbered them in succession. Bill, on the other hand, has intercepted each sheep at the gate of the farm, painted a number in tar on the near side of each wether and on the off side of each ewe, and run the whole lot together into the farmyard. Moreover, he has duplicated the numbers, and thus there are six wethers marked with the number " one " on the near side, and six ewes with the number " one " on the off side, and so on. Altogether there are about two hundred panting, frightened

sheep bearing almost illegible numbers on one side or the other, which must be picked out one by one and distributed into a matter of thirty pens. The farm-hands have already more than they can do ; and it seems doubtful if the sale can be held at all. Bill's voice becomes louder, and his language stronger.

" Lord damn my shirt ! us be doing nothing ! " he ejaculates in desperation, for only two hours are left for the penning of the sheep. Then his eye falls on the boys, who are drinking in the whole scene with great enjoyment.

" For the love of mercy's sake, Mr. Raymond, get they wethers out " ; and the boys, realising that everything turns upon them, plunge in among the sheep, and begin their search.

" Number one on the near side," they repeat softly to themselves, as they grope among the sheep, soaking their clothes with the grease from the hot fleeces and smearing them liberally with tar.

" Yurr's one," suddenly yells Mr. Alfred, pouncing upon an unfortunate wether, which he quickly bestrides and drags forward by the horns.

" Yurr's another," cries David, struggling manfully and holding on till Dick comes to his assistance.

" Yurr's another," sings out Raymond, who is

strong enough to tackle his sheep by himself. And so the first pen is filled, and the brothers proceed to " number two on the near side " ; and the work goes forward, not without wrangles as to the significance of Bill's figures, which are not easy to decipher, and with at least one furious outburst from Bill when a farm boy brings forward a ewe instead of a wether.

At last all the wethers are penned, and Bill retires for refreshment. But by this time there is more space, and the ewes are difficult to catch, so Mr. Raymond decides to move the hurdles and pen them closer. The ewes watch their opportunity and make a dash for liberty, whereupon Mr. Raymond, who is a wonderful mimic, shouts, " Git vor 'em," so exactly in Bill's voice that Bill's dog instantly obeys and heads the ewes back. By this time a certain number of onlookers have gathered together, and Bill, returning from his refreshment, is greeted with roars of laughter. The dog, realising that he has been fooled by a stranger, construes this demonstration as an insult to himself, and after a few plaintive barks of protest, retires growling into the house. However, the boys work on, and at the stroke of noon the last pen of ewes is completed, and all is ready for the auctioneer.

Thirsty as only boys can be, the four then enter the house at the invitation of Mrs. Bill, and are ushered into the best parlour, where the wax fruit and the family Bible are set out to do them honour. They reject rough cider, and would gladly be content with water with their bread and cheese, but good Mrs. Bill will not hear of it.

"Why, Mr. David," she says, addressing the youngest boy, "you mustn't never drink water, so hot as you be! Why, my dear, 'twill be the death of 'ee. Now let me pour in a little drop of gin, do 'ee, Mr. David, my dear."

Now, gin and water does not commend itself to the juvenile palate, but the boys find it difficult to refuse, consistently with good manners, and they are so thirsty that they would drink anything cold. So they taste the gin and water, and, finding that the gin is sweet and the water fresh and cool from the spring, decide that it is not so bad, and gulp it down, adding buckets of pure water as soon as Mrs. Bill's back is turned. Finally, after a very hearty attack upon the bread and cheese, they sally out to the sale feeling ready for anything.

Meanwhile, Bill has been pressing liquor upon all visitors to hearten them to bid boldly; and the sheep sell well. Bill, who in appearance is incomparably the most disreputable person

present, perambulates the yard in his shirt sleeves with an old and filthy white felt hat drawn over his eyes, sucking a very black wooden pipe which, in spite of much hard language and probing with straws, resolutely refuses to draw. Cattle are not in so good demand as sheep, and the bidding becomes slack. Bill, by this time in a high state of exhilaration, thinks it incumbent on him to supplement the auctioneer's eloquence by his own, with evil results to the auctioneer's temper, and but little effect, beyond provoking mirth, upon purchasers. At last when the celebrated heifer "Tillup," otherwise Tulip, comes up to the hammer, Bill waxes sentimental over the loss of the "Missus's favouryte," and bids for her himself with much animation. The hammer falls and the auctioneer announces Mr. Dufty as the buyer of Tulip. "Me?" roars Bill indignantly. "I don't want the bitch"; and therewith he has high words with the auctioneer, and is only soothed by the immediate abandonment of the animal to the next highest bidder.

Finally comes the turn of the horses, which are led down with a flourish to the rostrum by Mr. Dick, the rest of the brothers tickling each animal with a hayfork on the belly as it leaves the stable. The auctioneer, after a glass of gin and

water, grows eloquent over their merits, particularly those of the last lot, "the celebrated mare, Darling." But no amount of capering can conceal the fact that the celebrated mare's near hind fetlock is as big as a hatbox; and the competition is slack. Mr. Raymond, who moves about quietly, bidding in the exact voice of divers visitors, raises the price from £10 to £13 : 10s., but can do no more. The sale is over, and the boys are waylaid by Mrs. Bill for a last very little drop of gin and water before they run home; and then on their way they lend assistance to the various purchasers of sheep, who have great difficulty in prevailing with their various lots to part from their former companions. After much yelping and running and waving of arms, they send the last lot on its road, and make their way to the Hall. There, proudly conscious that without them the sale could never have taken place, they burst into the drawing-room to tell the tale. To their indignation they are instantly and ignominiously expelled by their sisters; and, as they retire to their ablutions, they deplore the unconscionable fastidiousness of women who object to a strong and acrid odour of sheep, diluted with a general flavour of farmyard, a considerable dash of coal-tar, and just the slightest suspicion of gin.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

V. A Bit of Poaching

His lordship was a staunch upholder of the Salmon Fishery Acts. His sons saw in them nothing but a masterpiece of ineptitude. His lordship's water was far from the sea. The salmon either did not run up till late, or they came up on a spring flood, were stopped in their ascent by a summer drought, and remained in the trout pools, disturbing (so the boys believed) the better trout, devouring the smaller, declining to look at a fly, and making themselves generally objectionable. Moreover, of what earthly profit was it to preserve these fish? They only went up and up until they reached water so small that it would hardly cover their back-fins, and were then, by scientific use of a pitchfork, hove ashore and devoured by the yokels on the moor. The boys had seen it done, and had joyfully participated in the act; so they knew. Altogether

the salmon were enemies deserving of attack at all points.

Thus it was that early on a hot August morning Mr. Alfred, aged fifteen, and Mr. Dick, a year younger, slipped out of the Hall by a side door, so as to evade their dogs, and crept away, taking advantage of every bit of cover, to the meadow which led to Bill Dufty the miller's. They carried with them an old salmon-rod, some rotten netting begged from the gardener, which was hidden away in an old fishing bag, three or four cod-hooks, and a couple of hazel-wands. At the far end of the meadow they came upon Bill's small boy and asked him : " Well, Bobby, what be doing ? "

" Looking out for Mr. Kingdon," piped Bobby slowly ; and Alfred and Dick understood. Mr. Kingdon was the water bailiff ; and Bill had thrown out this small scout for prudential reasons.

" Bide where you be, Bobby," they said, and so passed on to the mill.

There Bill was awaiting them, the dirt upon him masked by a veneer of flour. He was apparently just finishing the work of tying a cast, for a length of gut was in his hand, and odd ends of the same, evidently bitten off, were tangled in his beard. The boys marked the mill-leat

flowing at its fullest and, missing the roar of water over the weir, knew that Bill had made every preparation for them. For some five hundred yards, until the leat rejoined the main stream, there would be only a trickle of water in the river.

"Any fish, Bill, between the weir and the bridge?" asked Alfred.

"Well, I knows of tu," answered Bill, and glanced cautiously round.

Half a dozen cottages with their gardens lay between the mill and the high road. The men were at work, their wives within, the children at school. All was quiet, and Bill silently led the way to the river. Between the river and the bridge over the high road ran a straight stretch of about four hundred yards of rock, nearly dry but for a slender, shallow channel in the centre, and a few deeper pools under either bank. The banks themselves were high. On one side was a wood of great beech trees, whose low branches overspread almost the entire breadth of the stream; and a dense line of hazels on the other side effectually screened off all prying eyes from the cottages. Through the trees the sunshine glared down in blinding patches of light upon the wet rock and the trickle of water in the centre

channel. Never was there a better place for poaching.

"Yurr he *was*," said Billy softly, ducking under a branch and peering into a basin of rock, "and yurr he is," he added, pointing downward; and there, about four feet down, lay a ten-pound salmon, just moving fins and tail.

"Oh, let me snatch him!" whispered Dick eagerly.

"No, snatching's no fun," frowned Alfred, who had laid his rod down and was tying a cod-hook to the end of the line.

"Why not?" pleaded Dick. "We can put the net across the channel to stop him if I don't get him."

Good-natured Bill gave his vote to the younger boy, produced a length of noosed horsehair from his pocket, made it fast to a hazel-wand, opened the running noose wide, and put the wand into Dick's hand. Trembling with excitement the boy gently lowered the noose before the nose of the unsuspecting salmon, and moved it slowly back, past his eyes, past his gills, past his foremost fins—a very critical moment—and with a sudden heave whipped the fish to the surface. Then overbalancing himself, he fell headlong into the pool. Wild struggles presently issued in his

reappearance, spluttering and purple in the face, still holding on to the wand, but without the fish.

"Best not jump in arter mun, Mr. Dick," said Bill slyly, with a twinkling eye, "but he's still there right enough, and we must first let the water clear for Mr. Alfred to take a turn at mun."

But now Bobby's voice was heard piping. "Vather, Mr. Kingdon's a-waiting in the road, and his lordship and Lady Blanche, as taches to Sunday School, is a-galloping down towards mun."

"Lord damn my shirt!" ejaculated Bill, and hurried away to a point of vantage to reconnoitre. "Bide yurr, old son! Bide quiet, gentlemen."

But the boys were too much scared not to creep out and reconnoitre too. Yes, there was his lordship on his chestnut horse and their sister on her grey pony, cantering across the meadow, and far behind them two white specks, which sent the boys' hearts into their mouths.

"There's Spot and Spite," groaned Dick; "they'll cross our line and hunt us down as sure as fate, and that will give the whole show away."

And sure enough the two terriers pick up the line of their masters and carry it straight towards the mill; but by this time his lordship and the water-bailiff are conversing, and presently they move off in the desired direction down the river.

Bill returns to report all clear just as the terriers catch view of the boys and proclaim their joy with yelps that are promptly and sternly repressed. By this time the pool has cleared, and the salmon is visible at the very bottom, so that operations can begin again.

Alfred has already tied the cod-hook at the end of his line lightly to a hazel-wand, and he now makes over the rod to Dick, takes the wand in his hand and bends down over the pool to foul-hook the salmon in the tail. Deeper and deeper his arm sinks into the water till it laps over his chin. Purple in the face, he leans over more and more, but the wand is too short, and desperate measures are necessary. His head finally disappears under the surface, and then striking sharply he drops the wand ; and with a rush the fish tears down the channel, making a huge wave as he goes. The terriers at once start in pursuit in full cry.

" Give him the butt ! Give him the butt ! " gasps Alfred, above the scream of the reel ; but Dick is so much overpowered by laughing that he is helpless.

Fifty yards down, the fish jumps and lands on the bough of a beech tree, where the terriers bay him for a few seconds till he drops into the water

again, and starts off once more, dragging Dick after him, for luckily the hook has held firm. Alfred and Bill are crashing through the scrub on the bank with great strides ; the terriers are in full cry once more ; and Dick is staggering downstream over rock and shingle like a drunken boy. Now the bridge comes into sight through the boughs ; and mercy on us ! his lordship has turned back and is actually passing over it. Alfred rushes back to the breathless Dick and takes the rod from his hand, while Bill by a marvellous spurt gets ahead of the salmon, and jumping into the shallow before him, turns him back. Heaven be praised, his lordship has seen nothing nor heard the yapping of the terriers. Now they hunt the unfortunate fish upstream, and keep him going until he reaches the deep pool below the weir, where he spends his strength in fruitless struggles till Bill at last hand-lines him to the bank. With their father in the vicinity the boys decide not to try again, and go home by a devious route.

But in the evening Bill appears at the house with the salmon-rod, now decorated with an old " Jock Scott " fly, carrying also the fish in a bag. He has a beautiful story ready as to the capture of the salmon, declaring that never in all his experience has he known a fish take a fly with

the water so low. But he is careful to have the fish prepared for dinner before he acquaints his lordship, so that there may be no awkward *post-mortem* examination; and his lordship, good man, as he eats the first mouthful, racks his memory for parallel instances of salmon rising in a drought. And Alfred and Dick, very neat and clean in their Eton collars, listen gravely with much kicking of each other under the table.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

VI. Harvesting

Corn harvest has been losing its old significance ever since the repeal of the Corn Laws, and machinery has done away with much of its old romance. Even fifty years ago the sickle and the flail were rarely seen, though on remote farms I remember both at work. But there was a different spirit about agriculture before the awful year 1879, when, owing to incessant rain, crops were still rotting in the fields, cut or uncut, in November ; fluke was busy destroying the sheep, and even, in some places, the cattle, and farmers and country landowners were ruined by hundreds. Before that every one, high and low, male and female, came to help in the cornfields, and sun-bonnets were nearly as plentiful as hats. For though there were mechanical reapers there were no mechanical binders, and there was some little art in tying a sheaf swiftly and neatly, with a final

touch of balancing it for an instant on the right forefinger, which betrayed the master.

The squire's sons were all of them proficient in this matter, and not less so in the art of handling a horse and cart and of wielding a " pick," or pitchfork, for, though they went harvesting with expectations of a little sport at the end of the day, they recognised the duty of making themselves useful until the end came. Until he moved from his farm to the mill, Farmer Bill Dufty was the man whom they were readiest to help — first, because he was a very old friend ; secondly, because he would trust them with a horse and cart ; and thirdly, because one of Bill's farm-hands, who was always set to arrange the sheaves in the cart, was a half-baked body, with an uncertain temper and a wonderful flow of language. The essence of handling a cart was to know the horse's name, the utterance of which, with a convulsive " Ah ! " tacked on to the end, caused the animal to move on, while " Woa ! " made him stop. The names in use on practically every farm were the same, " Whitefoot " (generally contracted to the last syllable and pronounced like the French *fute*) and " Prince " for horses, " Charlotte " and " Darling " for mares. I have no doubt that " Prince " was in honour of George,

Prince Regent, and " Charlotte " of George III.'s queen. During the 'eighties there was an irruption of " Jubilee " (pronounced " Chiply ") and " Jumbo," but these ephemeral and unworthy appellations soon passed out of vogue.

However, when Farmer Bill Dufty was carrying corn, Mr. Dick, aged thirteen, always made a rush for the cart which contained the half-baked body, and took charge of it, while his two brothers followed closely with their picks. Arrived at the line of stooks, the two brothers proceeded to load with extreme rapidity, so as to smother the half-baked body with sheaves. Very soon, though he worked like a beaver at ordering the load, he began to rave, whereupon Mr. Dick would shout at the top of his voice, " 'Old 'ard ! " (a warning to all in the cart to mind themselves), " Fute-ah," whereupon the cart moved on to the next stooks, and the process was repeated until the half-baked body was in a state of delirium and the cart was filled. Then came the steering of the load through narrow gateways and the backing of it up to the stack, all of them matters requiring some little address, and, therefore, useful for a boy to master. Carrying went forward rapidly when his lordship's sons were in the field.

But reaping, especially in a field which ad-

joined a covert, was the business which brought reward to those who had worked diligently at binding. For hours the boys watched the machine going round and round in a narrowing circle, until only a slender strip was left standing, and the supreme moment was come. Then they called their dogs—three terriers and a Dalmatian ; the farmer's sheep-dog and spaniel became alert ; the farmer himself walked slowly into the remnant of standing corn, and the rabbits began to bolt. And then came pandemonium. Hapless rabbits, bewildered by the maze of lying sheaves, made desperate efforts to escape to their burrows in the bank-fence, and men, women, boys and dogs pursued them in every direction with yells and shouts and yaps. His lordship's butler and the valet of one of his guests, being old hands, quietly took up their positions, each with a pitchfork, and knocked rabbit after rabbit on the head. But the younger souls, human and canine, lost their heads completely. In a few minutes the Dalmatian and the sheep-dog were fighting furiously. Pursuing two different rabbits at right angles to each other, they had charged and sent each other flying, risen up growling, and attacked each other at once.

Hardly were they separated when two of the

terriers became engaged in mortal combat from the same cause ; and between stopping the fights and hunting the rabbits the young gentlemen were sufficiently busy. The din of growls and snarls and squeals and cries died away from time to time, to give place to the clatter of the machine, when the steady narrowing of the one place of refuge caused another bolt of rabbits and a fresh outburst of chaos, until the machine moved forward for the last time, and the last stalks of corn lay on the ground. From fifty to sixty dead rabbits were then counted, though with more scientific management the number might have been doubled, and boys and dogs threw themselves on the ground, delighted but exhausted. The dogs were generally streaming with blood, having cut their tongues badly against the sharp stubble, and were sometimes so weak in consequence that they had to be carried to water before they could creep home. This duty, of course, fell on the " young gentlemen," who accordingly returned to their own place in a state that suggested a strenuous day at the shambles, and that did not endear them to the unhappy person who was responsible for their clothing. But a boy who has not a touch of the savage is no true boy, and will never grow up into a true man.

IN QUARANTINE

I

In the winter of 1873 there raged at the public school of St. Anselm's an epidemic of mumps which, first and last, laid low more than half of the younger boys. The three brothers, Raymond, Alfred and Dick, weathered the storm triumphantly until the last Sunday of the term, when, at early chapel, while his fellows were engaged in the familiar task of coughing down the reader of the epistle, Dick suddenly toppled over with a crash, sweeping an avalanche of hymn-books before him, and was carried out of the building in a dead faint. He was presently consigned to the sanatorium; and Raymond and Alfred, on the ensuing Tuesday, went home for their Christmas holidays without him. As a measure of precaution, his lordship sent them to live for a time with the head-gamekeeper, whose wife had been a cook, and who had no children; and there,

being their own masters, they passed their time as agreeably as was possible for two boys of fifteen and fourteen, hunting or shooting or ferreting all day, and entertaining the many common friends whom they shared with the gamekeeper in the evening.

After about ten days they were re-admitted to the Hall, being judged to be safe, and a few days later Dick returned from the sanatorium and was stowed away in a remote wing of the Hall above the agent's office. The rooms in that quarter were not perhaps very inviting, being small and rather dark, with plain whitewashed walls and such scraps of carpet as the housekeeper could raise for emergencies. But they contained nothing that could suffer damage from any ordinary escapade, and they had old-fashioned grates on which a fire could be piled half-way up the chimney. With such a fire to greet him, with *Peter Simple*, *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, *Handley Cross*, and *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* awaiting him on the table, and with such dainty food as he had not seen for four months, Dick entered upon his new residence with remarkable content, considering that he was still to be isolated from his brothers and not allowed to go out on a wet day. Even a boy soon discovers that he cannot

have everything; and at least he was at home and delivered from that dull sanatorium, where the only amusement was to watch one of his fellow-patients, a precocious young scapegrace of sixteen, making love to the matron.

Dick's solitude, however, was not destined to last long. On the very next day tumultuous steps were heard on the stairs, and his brother Raymond bounded into the room with a pale face and a flannel bandage round his jaws, and exclaimed exultingly, "Alfred and I have both got mumps and we don't care a damn. We shall all be here together." Having said which he spun round, fell in a heap on the floor, and was promptly borne off to bed. Alfred was presently carried in to join him, having collapsed rather earlier in the day, and last of all David, the youngest of the four, appeared on the back of a footman. He had not got mumps, for he was as yet still at a private school, but had cut his foot so badly that he was unable to walk; and, seeing that he was thus already on the sick-list, it was obvious that the sooner he caught mumps and got it over, the better for himself and for all parties. He himself, enchanted at the prospect of being with his brothers instead of alone in his own quarters in the Hall, entered thoroughly into the spirit

of the arrangement, but, as a matter of fact, resolutely declined to catch mumps then or at any other period.

For a day or two Raymond and Alfred were rather sorry for themselves, and needed the attendance of Dr. Job Passmore, but they quickly passed into convalescence; and then their time would have hung heavily upon their hands, but for the happy circumstance that they filled their cartridges for themselves. So the corners of the room were stacked with boxes of empty cartridge cases, and on the table, within five feet of a roaring fire, were set one huge wooden bowl full of glossy black powder, a companion bowl full of shot, one heap of greasy felt wads and another of cardboard wads, while machines of various kinds for ramming, turning over, and the like were screwed on at every corner. Any casual visitor would have predicted that the boys must infallibly blow themselves up, but they did not. On the contrary, they were most conscientious and careful over the explosives, for, directly the lamps were brought in at nightfall, all powder was poured away into metal canisters, and cartridge-making ceased until the morrow. Thus with four dogs, which frequently fought for the best place before the fire, with cartridges and with occasional quarrels, they

made out their time fairly well. Raymond and Alfred had no great love of letters and gave up the whole of their thoughts to sport, whereas Dick was one of those contemptible boys who come out at the top of his form at the end of term, bring home prizes from school, and descend to the like petty successes. He was, moreover, delicate and short-sighted, whereas the others were strong and had the eyes of hawks; in fact, in matters of sport he was, though desperately keen, a duffer. For these defects in Dick his elder brothers made disdainful, though not unkindly, allowance; but they could not tolerate his habit of putting his best and most conscientious work into everything that he undertook; and when Dick looked critically at cartridges "turned over" by Alfred, who was rather a slap-dash worker, and proceeded without a word to "turn them over" again and attempt to impart to them a professional finish, his conduct was very properly resented. On the other hand, Dick had a certain faculty of rhyming, and would immortalise any particularly ludicrous incident in a style which delighted his brothers and for which they pardoned him much.

As their convalescence progressed, the servant who had been told off to them was withdrawn to his own quarters, a hundred yards away at the

other end of the house ; and the boys were provided with an old cracked hand-bell, which had been worn out in the service of calling the servants to prayers, with instructions to ring the same whenever they wanted him. But they very soon discovered that to ring a hand-bell efficiently is not so easy as it looks ; and, since the bell at its best emitted but a feeble sound, they set it aside and sent Dick, who by now was completely recovered, down to the door of their lodgings to yell. Dick, after swift musing over the style of noise that would be most suitable to the occasion, decided that his best view-halloa would meet the case, and proceeded to emit a series of piercing and rapturous shrieks. This was too much for the brothers. David promptly hobbled downstairs and added a shrill voice to Dick's, and Raymond and Alfred, defying the raw cold of a very dark and rainy evening, hurried down likewise to raise a deafening chorus. The immediate result was that the stable-lads turned out in a body and rushed to the spot with buckets, under the impression that the house was on fire. This was a little embarrassing, for the alarm communicated itself likewise to the body of the house. The entire establishment was stirred to its depths ; his lordship was subjected to an unconscionably

long interval between two courses at dinner—a thing which, being an eschewer of luncheon, he particularly disliked — and only the tact of Mr. Hooper, the butler, averted a searching inquiry and unpleasant consequences. Thenceforward, therefore, whenever the boys wanted their servant, it was a matter of course that they should go to the door in a body and yell till he came. As he was a great raw Devonshire lad, just brought into the house for training, had a keen sense of the ridiculous and was disinclined to hurry himself, they often yelled for long in vain; but as he was rarely wanted apart from his periodical visitations, this was no great matter.

II

Having once made their way downstairs — which was directly against the doctor's orders — the boys at once began to frequent the office of the agent's clerk on the ground-floor. This clerk, Antony Vuzzcombe by name, was a rather pompous individual of fifty-two or fifty-three. His functions, whatever they may have been nominally, consisted, in effect, chiefly in keeping the game-book, which he did with great neatness and accuracy, and strutting about the game-larder

with an important and aristocratic air. For the Vuzzcombes, as he never failed by frequent hints to convey, were an old family which had seen better days, though nothing now remained of their former splendour but the family vault, somewhere in Mid-Devon, where Antony himself expected in due time to repose with his ancestors. With such antecedents he was of course at home with venison, and would survey a haunch with the air of one who had strong traditions of a deer-park of his own. Combining these exalted tastes with a strong indisposition to work, he had always welcomed the boys to his office, where he would gossip to them by the hour concerning the present lord, the late lord, the lord of all, and every one of whatever standing at Northacott. As, moreover, he was a great smoker, the boys found his office a very convenient place in which to smoke themselves on the sly upon wet days, for his lordship rightly discountenanced their indulgence in tobacco. Thus they began again to meet old friends, who likewise dropped into the office, such as Mr. Gould, the head gamekeeper, and Bill Dufty the miller, and gave them pressing invitations, which were joyfully accepted, to spend the evening with them and play a rubber of whist after the day's work was over. Two more friends of superior

standing also took pity upon them, Mr. Blackaller, a yeoman who lived not far away, and Mr. Mountjoy, the solicitor, who was agent to a neighbouring squire. Both were keen sportsmen, who were frequently invited to shoot his lordship's coverts, and would good-naturedly call in on their way home from hunting and help the boys through the trying interval between nightfall and dinner.

The whist-parties were a great success, and the idiosyncrasies of their guests gave the boys the keenest enjoyment. The old-fashioned long whist alone was recognised at Northacott, and certainly it was of the very longest. Mr. Gould could never play a card without protracted meditation, and Bill Dufty, while headlong with winning cards, was as cautious as Mr. Gould with all other. Mr. Vuzzcombe on the other hand played with patrician ease and dignity, neither too hasty nor too prompt, though he would occasionally linger at critical moments to show that his whole intellect was concentrated upon the game. He generally presented himself in his Sunday frock-coat and made a distinguished figure at the table. Mr. Gould and Mr. Dufty were inveterate bottlers of trumps; and Mr. Vuzzcombe's instincts were the same as theirs,

but, having once overheard the late lord denounce men who bottle their trumps as unworthy to live in this world and certain of eternal punishment in the next, he would from time to time—and generally at the wrong time—lead out his trumps with an air. However, as befitted one of illustrious descent, he played, for the most part, with correctness and calm.

Mr. Gould and Mr. Dufty, on the other hand, had their peculiarities. The former, who was very tall and had very long legs, had a way of intimating to his partner, by sly kicks under the table, the number of trumps in his hand; and Mr. Dufty, who was aware of this wile, manœuvred to intercept these kicks when Gould was not his partner, and to receive and return them when he was. Further, at the close of every hand Mr. Gould never failed to ejaculate, rapidly and decisively, "Tu by honours," and, unless carefully watched, to add that number to his score. Mr. Dufty's methods were more ingenuous. He would say wistfully, "Oh, Mr. Alfred, if only yu would lead me the card that I want!" and then by the merest accident a card of the required suit would be dropped on the table, and hastily gathered up again with apologies. Singularly enough, Mr. Dufty had a superstitious dread of

the queen of spades. He was never quite happy when she was in his own hand; and, when she fell to his adversaries and won a trick for them, it was only by an excursion into the canine world that he could find the right epithet for her.

Altogether, though they played only for love, this whist kindled the keenest excitement in all that took part in it; and as Mr. Hooper, the butler, did not grudge an allowance of liquor, the evenings passed off very pleasantly. Mr. Vuzzcombe, always superior, begged for claret, which was duly accorded to him, though report said that in his own home he preferred gin, and plenty of it. The other guests drank whisky, which was much appreciated by Mr. Dufty, whose experience was confined mostly to the vile black brandy of the neighbouring inns. "Lord damn my shirt! but this is gude whisky," he would exclaim; and he would add thoughtfully, as one to whom every country house in the realm was familiar, "I consider that his lordship hath so gude a glass of whisky to his cellar as any man in England." When Bill was present, Mr. Hooper generally appeared towards the close of the evening, sometimes to take a hand himself, sometimes ostensibly to gossip with the guests, but always with the real object of standing between

his beloved young gentlemen and any possible unpleasantness.

Once only did anything of the kind occur. Mr. Dufty accused Mr. Vuzzcombe of a revoke—justly, though the fault was unpremeditated. Mr. Vuzzcombe, in all good faith, denied the charge with pompous warmth, having an uneasy, and not ill-founded, suspicion that Bill never lost an opportunity of spraying him with sly ridicule. Bill, much in earnest, insisted upon the revoke ; turned tricks were produced and scattered about the table ; appeals were made to all present, none of whom by any accident ever remembered the fall of any card, and the dispute waxed hot. Suddenly, as if by magic, the controversy ceased to turn upon cards and raged with fury concerning the family history of the Vuzzcombes and the Duftys. Mr. Vuzzcombe gave the provocation by instituting a comparison between Bill and one of his uncles who, it appeared, in a certain horse-dealing transaction had not shown himself a model of probity. Bill flared up instantly in defence of his kinsfolk. He began by a general statement that the Duftys were as old as the Vuzzcombes, and infinitely to be preferred in honour ; and then, rending the Vuzzcombes' family vault asunder, he dragged skeleton after skeleton into the light.

There was Mr. Antony's great-uncle, who, in Bill's picturesque phrase, " wude have chated the Lord Almighty out of his shoe-strings, if he cude "; there was his great-aunt, consort of the aforesaid, who was so mean that she grudged her fowls their own egg-shells ; there were his two female cousins, offspring of the above, " who rinned away to Plymouth after no gude with the sojers and sailors " ; there was their brother, " who was the half of a fule." In fact, Mr. Dufty, by a torrent of eloquent invective, swept the good fame of generations of Vuzzcombes into ruin.

Mr. Antony attempted to interrupt, but in vain. Whisky prevailed over claret ; and Mr. Antony sat speechless, with his grey whiskers bristling and his countenance, to the very summit of his bald head, purple with rage. Bill was still declaiming, and the four boys were rolling in their chairs, helpless with laughter, when Mr. Hooper came in, took in the situation at a glance, and changed his usual broad smile into something very like a frown. With a few tactful words he restored calm, and pointed out to the disputants that the young gentlemen could not help laughing at their absurdity. Thereupon the young gentlemen became grave at once. Bill quickly began to laugh as he realised that he had been making a

fool of himself, and, having had the better of Mr. Vuzzcombe, expressed regret for his pleasantry. Mr. Vuzzcombe, much injured in his dignity, was less easily placated, but presently gave way ; and Bill, handsomely taking his leave first, left him to end the evening in sole possession of the field. When the boys waited upon him in the office next morning, he began to turn the conversation to the antecedents of the Duftys, but, being appealed to by Raymond to help him administer a pill to his terrier, wisely took the hint, and deferred his criticism of the Dufty family to a more convenient season.

III

The boys now began to clamour to be allowed to resume their usual avocations out of doors, but Dr. Job Passmore, though holding out hopes for the near future, shook his jolly head and gently refused permission. Then came a trying temptation. The Oldbarrow Harriers were going to meet in a few days on the edge of the moor, not more than eight miles away. " Hang it, doctor," pleaded Raymond, " you can let us go out with them—only harriers, and a rotten pack at that." And the doctor's eyes twinkled as he thought

how the master of the Oldbarrow would enjoy the knowledge that at Northacott Hall his pack was considered rotten. The master was, as a matter of fact, one, Major Pinford, on the half-pay of some not greatly distinguished regiment of the Line, a fine breezy talker, but an exceedingly timid rider, though very constant at the meets of the local foxhounds. Recently he had set up the Oldbarrow Harriers in partnership with a respectable retired merchant, to whom his doctor had prescribed hunting for his health; and it was generally understood, rightly or wrongly, that the merchant produced the funds, while the Major hunted the pack, did all the talking and most of the horn-blowing, and plumed himself greatly upon the fact that he was a master of hounds. Of all this the doctor was as fully aware as the boys themselves, and he longed to let them go out and to hear of their adventures afterwards. But he could not forget his duty to their father, and was still putting the boys off with vague promises, when who should walk in together but Mr. Blackaller and Mr. Mountjoy.

To them Raymond poured out his hard case, with which they sympathised deeply; and they both began to plead with the doctor on the boys'

behalf. "Eight miles away," demurred Dr. Job Passmore, "and twelve hundred feet up. All very well if the weather's fine and hounds run towards Northacott. But suppose they run away from home, and the rain comes down in the afternoon with a south-westerly gale behind it, blowing in their teeth all the way home? How could I look his lordship in the face, Mr. Blackaller? No, be patient for a little bit yet, young gentlemen, and you shall have hunting enough." Mr. Blackaller nodded sadly; Mr. Mountjoy, exchanging a glance with him, became serious also; and the boys' spirits sank low.

Then suddenly Mr. Mountjoy's face lit up, his grey eyes began to twinkle, and catching Mr. Blackaller by the sleeve he whispered in his ear, with the result that Mr. Blackaller's melancholy expression gave place to a broad grin. Mr. Mountjoy continued to whisper rapidly, Blackaller nodding as rapidly; and presently they rose and asked the doctor to speak to them in an adjoining room. The three then solemnly retired, leaving the boys full of wonder, and presently reappeared, all with faint lurking smiles belying the assumed gravity of their features. Then the doctor, whose eyes were twinkling furiously, said, "Well, young gentlemen, I won't say more than this. This is

Monday. I'll call again on Wednesday and then, if all's well, I'll see if I can let you hunt with the harriers on Thursday as you wish."

Wednesday came, and first Mr. Mountjoy arrived, and then Mr. Blackaller, who cast an inquiring glance at Mountjoy, which was answered by a nod of great emphasis. Presently the doctor appeared, inspected his patients, and put the question, "What's the quicksilver doing, Mr. Blackaller?"

"Rising steadily," was the answer; "I think, doctor, we three had better have another consultation."

So once again they retired, and, when they re-entered, Mr. Blackaller said solemnly, "We three medical men have decided that you can hunt to-morrow. I have written to his lordship, and, with his permission, Mountjoy and myself shall ride up with you to Blagbarrow Post to-morrow morning, and I think we may have a good day's sport."

"So I hope and think," interjected Mr. Mountjoy, very gravely.

"But mind," went on Mr. Blackaller, very seriously, "you must promise to do just what we tell you."

"And, young gentlemen, you must be well

wrapped up," put in the doctor, "great-coats, and comforters round your necks."

"Look at the picture of Lord Scamperdale riding to the meet at Dallington Burn cross-roads, and dress yourselves like that," went on Mr. Blackaller, turning to page 175 of *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*; "any one who isn't well wrapped up, I shall leave behind. Now, young gentlemen, good evening—half-past nine to-morrow morning, sharp." And the three good-natured fellows withdrew, leaving the boys in the seventh heaven; and they could be heard whispering and chuckling all the way down the stairs.

IV

The next morning was fine, soft, and grey—a regular North Devon day—and when Mr. Blackaller rode up, a little before his time, the boys, smothered in great-coats and comforters, were all ready for him. Mr. Mountjoy, he explained, had gone on, for he had a little business with a tenant; the meet being on the property of the squire whose agent he was. However, when they reached the meet, Mr. Mountjoy was already there, standing in the midst of the pack with the master and listening to his eulogy of

his hounds. Major Pinford was a gentleman of rather full habit, with very important sandy-grey moustache and whiskers, and a jovial manner. He turned his horse round with a flourish as the boys came up, so that they might admire his green coat, new velvet cap, and pink tops, made them very welcome, asked after his lordship, and then, upon a hint from Mr. Mountjoy, resumed the praise of his hounds.

They were a mixed and uneven lot, of all sorts, shapes and sizes; and Mr. Mountjoy seemed very anxious to ascertain the names of four or five, almost white in colour, which stood nearly two inches higher than the rest and appeared to be a good deal speedier. The Major satisfied him, and then took up the tale himself: "This is the hound on which I depend when I'm in difficulties," he observed jocosely to Raymond, "for every huntsman is in difficulties sometimes—old Climber; he has the most wonderful nose that I ever met with in a hound."

"He looks like a wise 'un," assented Mr. Mountjoy, with a glance at the boys; "pity his toes are not equal to his nose," he added, eyeing Climber's feet, which showed lamentable signs of wear. Dick looked up sharply and made a mental note of the rhyme.

"Here's another wonderful hound," the Major went on, hastily changing the subject; "Bracelet, old bitch! Bracelet!" he called to an undersized black-and-tan old lady in very poor condition. "Something went wrong with her at the beginning of the season, and I've only lately been able to bring her out again."

Then there was a pause to admire Bracelet, in the course of which Mr. Blackaller whispered to Raymond that her indisposition had been due to a scandalous liaison with a sheep-dog. Raymond, of course, passed the information on to Alfred; and the Major, suspecting the reason of their amusement, abruptly closed the proceedings by saying, "Well, we had better be moving; you say that your keeper has found a hare for us, Mountjoy?"

"Yes," answered that gentleman, "will you kindly follow me?" and thereupon the cavalcade moved off, with Mountjoy in advance.

Very stately was the Major as he jogged on with his fourteen couple at his heels, and his whip bringing up the rear. This latter, by name Fairchild, a little old withered man in a green coat, a cap, very dark cord breeches, brown leather gaiters of great antiquity, heavy greased boots, and a single spur, was one of the curiosities

of the establishment. It seemed that at one time he had been engaged in commerce—to be exact, in the sale of blacking, if Mr. Mountjoy's information were correct—but previous to his failure in business he must have had a large experience in various avocations, for in Major Pinford's service he filled the offices not only of whip and kennel-huntsman, but of stud-groom, coachman, keeper of the pigs, tender of the bees, occasional dairyman and occasional gardener, while on Sundays he was in charge of the organ-bellows in church. He rode, with such dignity as he could command, on a broken-coated pony with one eye, a suspicious blemish on the knee of the near foreleg, and a tendency to asthma. His services were soon in request, for, passing through a bed of rushes, Governess and Active suddenly gave tongue, and in a moment the whole pack were skipping about the rushes like spaniels. Presently followed agonized squealing. The Major swore lustily: "Fairchild, where are you, you d——d fool?" Two farmers, who, with the party from Northacott, made up the whole field, echoed politely, "Mr. Virchil', the Captain's a-callin' of 'ee"; and the whip, hastily dismounting, rescued a hapless rabbit from the jaws of Chanter and Caroline, wrung its neck scientifically and put it

in his pocket. Having vented his displeasure in further imprecations upon Fairchild's head, and in fruitless lashings at Governess, the severest of which caught the faithful Bracelet and evoked a dismal yelp, the Major moved on.

North Devon is one of the worst of hunting countries, and from Blagbarrow Post it is easy to see why. From that point the eye travels across to Dartmoor over a tangle of hills and valleys intersected by thousands of high banks, one and all of them crowned by thick top-growth. These fences, except in very few instances, cannot be jumped; and, if you could jump them, you would very soon find yourself brought up by a wood—for all the valleys are more or less wooded, some of them for miles together—while, if you contrived to get through the wood, you would probably discover at the bottom of the valley a boggy patch, not very broad, but often sufficiently deep to engulf your horse, and on the other side a heart-breaking hill to ascend. This is why North Devon sportsmen like to get on to the moor, where, though the ground is rough and often deep, and the combes many and steep, the fences, though unjumpable, are few, and it is possible more or less to ride to hounds. Blagbarrow Post lies, as has been told, on the edge of the moor upon

ground reclaimed from it—large grass fields of from twenty to forty acres with a certain number of banks free from top-growth and therefore surmountable.

Mountjoy led the pack to a patch of rushes in the corner of a field and held up his hand. The Major brought the hounds to the spot, and with a crash of music they took up the scent and were off. The Major cheered them on, sounded a few quite unnecessary blasts on his horn, and cantered through an open gateway into the next field. Then he awoke to the fact that his hounds were running as he had never seen them run before, and, hearing the rush of his small field behind him, he sat down and galloped hard after them. Reaching the bank at the far end of the enclosure, he jumped off and turned his horse's head to it, expecting that the docile animal would, as usual, clear it and wait for him at the far side. Clear it he did, after pausing at the top for a second to descend at his ease; when Mountjoy, Blackaller, and the four boys came charging at it, scrambled over and were off again at speed. This was too much for the old horse, such an event being quite unprecedented in his experience; and he galloped with them half-way across the next field, followed by the loud curses of the Major, before he recollected himself and pulled up.

Meanwhile the Northacott party, led by Mountjoy and Blackaller, galloped ahead, scrambled over the bank at the far end of the field and were alone with the hounds. The boys were mad with excitement, Raymond yelling, "Forrard! forrard!" at the top of his voice, with Alfred joining in occasionally; Dick laughing so continuously that he could make no other sound, and David, a very placid boy, grinning from ear to ear. The next fence was successfully passed and the next also without mishap, and then hounds bore slightly to the right downhill. They were already tailing sadly in consequence of the pace, the five white hounds leading, the rest towling after them in a long string, and Climber and Bracelet half a mile or more astern. The six turned down likewise, passed over a gap into a road, and there came upon Dr. Passmore in his yellow gig. "Forrard! forrard! forrard!" he yelled between great bursts of laughter, waving his whip across the road. Fifty yards along it they came to a gate, through which they passed, and Mountjoy, who waited until last, having given it a final vigorous shove, the doctor shifted his whip to his left hand and drove through it on the swing, catching it with his right hand just in time to save his splash-board. They were

now on the open moor, and hounds were running straight again, along the ridge of a hill; but Mountjoy found time to glance back occasionally at the yellow gig as the doctor drove it at a canter down the grassy slope. He saw it sink axle-deep in a soft place and emerge with an effort; and then, satisfied as to Dr. Passmore's safety, he never again took his eye off the hounds. They were still racing, but the ground was sound, and the boys were in exultation.

Then the yellow grass changed to a magpie mixture of grass and heather, and Blackaller held up his hand. Dick, always laughing hysterically, failed to notice the signal, and his pony, galloping too fast into deep ground, came down, shooting Dick over her head. Then recovering herself with a flounder, she placed a forefoot upon the boy's hat and pressed it down well into the bog. Blackaller was at her head in an instant. "Not hurt?" he asked. "Good Lord, no!" was the answer, as the boy climbed back into the saddle.

"Oh, Mr. Blackaller, I am so sorry!" he went on, with the humble consciousness of being a duffer, as they picked their way with such speed as they could muster through the treacherous water-logged tangle of tussock and heather.

"Not a bit," replied Mr. Blackaller, "we

haven't lost a hundred yards, and we'll catch them directly we've crossed this beastly soggy ground. Now, come along," he added a few minutes later, as they emerged upon sound heather again. "Ah! see, they've checked." And sure enough, the white hounds had thrown up, though a few couple were still yelping their souls out far behind them. The boys in a desperate state of heat unbuttoned their great-coats and untied their comforters. Dick, in obedience to Blackaller, dismounted to examine his pony's feet, reported all shoes present and no overreach, and lost no time in regaining his saddle, while Mountjoy said, "Put them on to me, Blackaller; she must be forrard. Here, Manager, Wistful, Lavender!"

"What! you know their names?" said Blackaller with a grin.

"Took care to learn some of 'em," replied Mountjoy, with a wink.

Hounds had checked just short of a huge impossible bank, and along this Mountjoy cast such few of them, about five couple, as were up. "Manager has it," he cheered presently, as one of the white hounds threw his tongue and sprang up a weak place in the fence. "Yoi, over, over, over, over!" Then the six galloped off to a friendly gate hard by, and away they went again best place, with the

four comforters of the four boys streaming behind them like mourning-weepers. The line still followed the crest of the hill, sound going for the most part though broken by occasional patches of bog; but the keen edge had been taken off the horses, and all were relieved when hounds gradually slanted to the bottom. Shortly afterwards they disappeared through a big fence at the foot, and there came the sound of a shrill "Who-hoop!"

They had some difficulty, owing to a tangle of small enclosures, in reaching the spot whence the sound came, but soon they found their way to a small field, where there were discovered some five couple of hounds and a man in a velveteen coat yelling like a madman. "Why, Harry!" cried Mountjoy, with great apparent surprise, "where do you come from?"

"Well, Mr. Munjy," answered the keeper, suppressing a laugh, but grinning very broadly indeed, "I was down looking to my traps in Ashacombe Wood, when I yurred the 'ounds pointing this way, as I thought, and came up to get on to the common. And just as I got to the gate, back there, down they come in view. I rinned as fast as I cude, but, bless your life, avore I cude get nigh to 'em, they had caught

her and pulled her abroad, and ate her; and I couldn't find nothing of her, but thiccy 'ere," and he held up the torn fore-leg of a hare, which had not the appearance of having been very newly killed.

"Let's have your knife, Harry," answered Mountjoy, "and I'll cut the pad off to give to the Major when he comes. There," he said, when the operation had been completed. "Here, Manager!" and he tossed down the rest of the leg to Manager, who, after a short but furious contest with Driver, gulped it down.

"Pity but what we could have saved her," said Harry, with a twinkling eye; "she was a fine hare, tu, big enough to feed a whole fam'ly." And then a gate was thrown open, and in drove Dr. Passmore, with both horse and gig much bespattered. "Well, young gentlemen," he said, his eyes beaming through his blue spectacles under his soft black felt hat, "you've had a fine run, I reckon."

"A five-mile point or thereabout," answered Blackaller; "the straightest-necked hare that I ever hunted."

"Ah! I know those hares," rejoined the doctor. "The surprising thing is that no one ever gave me one to take home to dinner. But,

hullo, here's some one who's been down," he added, looking at Dick's dirty coat; "and where's your hat, Mr. Dick?"

"Lost the beastly thing," answered Dick, flushing: "it was miles too big for me."

"Well, now, you must borrow a handkerchief, or something, and tie it round your head. And, young gentlemen, I want those comforters tied up, please, and then ride quietly home as soon as you can. It's a very lucky coincidence," he added, with a knowing smile, "that this hare should have led you to within four miles of Northacott."

"We're only waiting for the master to come up," said Blackaller, "and then, I promise you, doctor, that we'll take them straight home. I can't leave these hounds here, and I certainly don't want them at my place."

It was a full quarter of an hour after the kill before Major Pinford, attended by Climber and Bracelet, rode up, by which time twelve out of the fourteen couple had towled their way to the finish, and the keeper, Harry, had discreetly disappeared. The Major was not too well pleased that his hounds should have run away from him, and that all the obsequies should have been completed before his arrival; but Blackaller and

Mountjoy gave such an account of the run, and of the performance of the hounds, and made such excellent excuses for the rearward situation of the master, that the Major was soon mollified, and began to take credit to himself for the whole of the day's proceedings. "They were too fast for us, Major Pinford," was Mountjoy's conclusion, "and had broken her up before we could get to them; but I rescued a pad from old Manager. From all that I hear, you have so many good runs that this is nothing out of the way; but I shall ask your leave to give the pad to Mr. David here, who rode like a man from start to finish." To this the Major good-naturedly assented, adding a pretty speech about the pleasure that it gave him to see his lordship's sons out with his hounds, and riding well to them.

"And now," he went on, "where's that d——d fool Fairchild?"

"I think that I see him coming over the nap of the hill," said Blackaller, pointing to a distant figure on horseback. "Ah," he continued presently, as he saw the figure dismount, make a sudden pounce upon the ground, pick up what was evidently a rabbit, wring its neck and put it into his pocket, "yes, that's Fairchild right enough." And in a few minutes the old whip

rode up, with his pockets bulging and one couple of hounds at his heels. He explained in a low voice to the master that Frolic and Dustman had "tuk'd after a sheep," but that he had caught them "and given them what vor." The reunion of the staff of the Oldbarrow Harriers being now complete, the party from Northacott took leave, with many compliments, of the master, and started to ride home.

V

"Well, it wasn't such a bad run, was it?" observed Mountjoy to Raymond. The boy looked up at him curiously. "Haven't we been running a drag?" he asked, and Mountjoy and Blackaller burst into loud laughter.

"So you've found it out, have you?" said the former. "Yes, old Dr. Passmore wouldn't let you go out unless it was a short day and a short ride home, so I chose the line and Harry ran it, and had a dead hare ready for them at the end. We wanted you to have a bit of sport, and we didn't object to getting a rise out of old Pinfold."

"How awfully good of you!" answered the boy, more touched than he cared to show; and his brothers echoed these awkward but sincere words of gratitude.

"They made no difficulty about hunting the line," observed Dick.

"Lord bless you, those hounds would hunt anything," chuckled Mountjoy: "deer, fox, hare, rabbit, otter—sheep, for that matter—it's all one to them."

"I see," said Dick, and became thoughtful. He let his pony lag behind, and before long was summoned by Raymond with all an elder brother's fervour of discipline. "Come *on*, Dick!" And as the boy trotted up, he added, "Why the devil can't you keep up, and what the devil are you smiling at?"

"I've got the beginning," answered Dick nervously, "and I've got part of the end, and I was busy with the middle when you called me."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Raymond, very anxious to give his younger brother a lesson in manners.

"Listen," said Dick, and proceeded to recite the following lines:

> "The hounds of famous Pinfold's breed
> Disdain the scent of aniseed.
> You have to make them drunk on beer
> Before they'll own the scent of deer.
> They'll take a line through endless flocks,
> But never change upon a fox.

So free are they from all bad habit,
They'd sooner die than touch a rabbit,
And it would fairly make you weep
To see how shy they are of sheep.

That's the beginning," he went on very quickly, " and here are some lines towards the end :

And up at last the Major steals
With aged Climber at his heels—
Oh, could the veteran's weary toes
Be fresh as his unerring nose !—
And Bracelet, who, I grieve to tell,
Loved ' Ship ' not wisely, but too well.

I suppose the sheep-dog's name was ' Shipperd,' " he added apologetically ; " it generally is."

Mountjoy stared at the boy for a moment, and then he and Blackaller burst into a roar of laughter. " You send me that poem when it's finished," he said ; " promise me."

" All right, if you like," answered Dick, much surprised, and not in the least flattered, for he wrote for no public except his brothers, who were exceedingly candid critics. So Northacott was duly reached, and the four boys settled down for the afternoon with great content.

A few days later the poem was completed and sent to Mountjoy, who (happily, in the author's absence) read it aloud to the whole of a large fox-

hunting field, to the great amusement of his audience, and the fury of Major Pinfold, who for weeks did not hear the last of it. Luckily for Dick, the matter did not reach his father's ears, otherwise he would have trounced the boy for lampooning one who had given him a good day's sport. But his lordship himself thanked Major Pinfold so gratefully for his kindness to his sons when next he met him, that the Major's wounded feelings were speedily healed. The boys were not sent back to school until late, in compensation for the time lost through sickness ; and they have since declared that the very best holidays that they ever spent were those during which they were sequestered in quarantine.

THE KILLING OF BLACKMORE'S PIG

MAJOR RAYMOND (for all the folks at Northacott proudly added his military rank to the familiar Christian name) stepped out of the train at Northacott station and exchanged a few words with the station-master and other friends of the railway staff. He then announced that he would walk to the Hall, and started to climb the steep hill that made the first stage of a short mile's journey. It was six o'clock on a December evening. The familiar south-west wind was singing, not too loudly, among the branches. The familiar rain had evidently been falling during most of the day, but the clouds were now fairly high, and, with the moon just up, the road was not ill-lighted. The familiar chestnut trees, twisted and contorted by many hundred gales, swung their bare limbs over his head as he strode by the familiar fence of the deer-park. Everything that could be seen or heard or felt or smelled was there to remind him of his beloved North Devon; yet his thoughts

were busy with a very prosaic matter, to wit, the canteen of his regiment of Lancers. He had instituted a new system, to ensure that the men should get their full share of the profits; the canteen-sergeants had set their faces against it, and he had turned out five of them in quick succession. Now he hoped and believed that he had found a man who would work cordially with him; and he saw visions of great improvement of the men's diet and comfort, at no extra cost to them. Of course the men would assume that he was putting the additional profits into his own pocket, but they would learn better in time, and —what on earth was that white square package on the road in front of him? Was it a tin of biscuits, or what form of dry canteen article? And then a little figure came out of the shadow, laid hold of the package, shouldered it painfully for a few yards, stopped and laid it down. Again with an effort he shouldered it, staggered on for a very short distance and stopped. The canteen fled away and gave place to Northacott, and the Major striding forward overtook the small boy and his burden. The child was white and panting; his black hair stuck out in damp pointed wisps from under his cap; and his violet eyes, fringed with very long dark lashes, looked up pathetically,

though with no lack of courage, into Raymond's. The Major, his six feet three inches heightened to the utmost by a long blue coat, towered over the little figure; the grey eyes were lightened by a twinkle, and the firm mouth, dreaded of defaulters, relaxed behind his fair moustache. The boy touched his cap and laid hold of his package again, with the air of one who never forgets his manners but can spare no time for conversation.

"Why, it's Jimmy Blackmore," said the Major; "what be doing here, Jimmy?"

"Vather's killed the pig," responded Jimmy, slowly and enigmatically, with a jealous hand on his charge.

"And what's this?" asked Raymond, pointing to the bundle, which now revealed itself clearly as rectangular and bound up in a voluminous sheet of coarse canvas, knotted at the four corners.

"'Tis the salt," answered Jimmy; and then Raymond realised the importance of the occasion. In the illuminated calendars of mediaeval books of devotion are portrayed the rustic occupations of each month—seed-time, hay-harvest, corn-harvest, vintage, the shaking down of mast for swine to devour and grow fat thereon and so

forth, but the triumphant climax of all is the slaying of the swine. For centuries untold the greatest day of the cottager's year is that whereon he kills his pig and assures his stock of bacon for himself and family.

The boy once again laid hold of his bundle. Raymond took it from him and lifted it. Swift calculation told him that his own heaviest portmanteau would be less of a burden to him than this block of salt to the boy. At the rate of progress which he had observed, the child would hardly travel one mile an hour, and would reach his destination, if he ever reached it at all, utterly exhausted.

"Be ye going to carry this all the way home?" he asked.

"Yas," answered Jimmy with confidence.

"No one coming to help 'ee?"

"No," answered Jimmy, with surprise.

"Father lives up to Zwittery, dothn't he?" Raymond went on. "I reckon that's two miles herefrom."

Jimmy was silent. He had not reached the age—some rustics never do—when he could grasp any measure of length except a landyard.

"But you mean to carry this all the way to Zwittery?" repeated Raymond.

" Yas," said Jimmy, a little dismayed, for he feared that he was doing something wrong.

" Then come along, Jimmy," said Raymond, picking up the bundle. " You and me'll go up to Zwittery together."

" How old be 'ee, Jimmy ? " he asked, as they set out.

" Twelve last Driverton Fair," was the answer. He looked little more than nine. Raymond already found the salt inconveniently heavy to carry in his hand and shifted it to his shoulder ; after which he asked : " You'm to school, I reckon, Jimmy ? Do you like schooling ? "

" No," answered Jimmy, with decision. " Vather saith as there's too much schooling nowadays, both for boys and maids. Maids be growing tu vine to wash their own shimazes," he added oracularly, " so vather saith."

" Have you any sisters, Jimmy ? Do they wash their own chemises ? " went on Raymond.

" Tu," replied Jimmy, " Anne and Mary. They'm too small to wash yet, but I reckon they will."

" I reckon so too," assented Raymond. " What are you going to be when you'm a man, Jimmy ? A sojer, like me ? "

" Sojer ? No," said Jimmy, shaking his head

gravely. "Vather saith as sojers is sarved very bad —flogged to death."

"I reckon Father's saying what his father told him," said Raymond; "there's no flogging now. But where be going, Jimmy?" he asked suddenly. They had come to a cross-road, and the child was taking that which led by a long round to Zwittery (the name is spelled Sweetworthy on the Ordnance map) instead of that which led to a path which cut off the corner. "Be ye afraid to take the church-path?"

"Yas," answered Jimmy, without shame or concealment.

"Why, then?" pursued Raymond; "be ye afraid of crossing the water? You'm not afraid of being drownded?"

"Drownded, aye, or pixy-led," answered Jimmy with very obvious alarm. "Yu mind, sir, Mr. Headon was pixy-led, and valled into the mill-late and was drownded two year agone?" Raymond did remember the incident. Mr. Will Headon was a labourer who was not unfrequently pixy-led and unable without difficulty to find his way home; but that was because he had a somewhat unruly passion for alcohol and had, in fact, been seen very drunk on the night when he met his end in the mill-leat. But the whole village

had sworn, from good fellow-feeling, that he was the soberest of men, and that they themselves, one and all, had narrowly escaped sharing his fate at one time or another, the mill-leat being neither more nor less than a death-trap for Queen Victoria's liege subjects at large. But it was useless to expound all this to a child, so Raymond only said :

" You won't be afraid to cross the water along with me, Jimmy ? "

" No," said the boy stoutly ; and the two resumed their way. The crossing of the water was not, indeed, in the least a terrifying matter. A stream in a little valley had been dammed up into a series of ponds, from one to another of which the water poured in a succession of small waterfalls. The path led across one of these dams, which was fully four yards broad, and bordered so thickly with rhododendrons and other high shrubs that the water itself was invisible. Dark trees, however, overhung it from above, which made the crossing somewhat gloomy and mysterious, while the hollow roar of the fall might add, to the imaginative mind, some element of terror. Jimmy kept very close to Raymond as they approached it.

" Give me your hand, Jimmy," said Raymond

as they passed through a kissing gate that opened on to the dam, for he knew the rustic dread of water. And the little fellow clung to it tight until they had crossed it and were presently breasting the hill beyond.

"Now we'm right, Jimmy," he said cheerfully. "You see, there's nothing to be afraid of. Now we'm getting up towards the churchyard. Be ye afraid to go through the churchyard night-times, Jimmy?"

"No," replied Jimmy, wonderingly.

"That's all right," commented Raymond, thinking that he himself at the age of twelve would have been terrified at the mere thought of traversing the churchyard alone in the dark. And then he put the question which had troubled him from the beginning, for he had thought well of Jimmy's father, Philip Blackmore, and did not understand how he could have sent the boy to carry so heavy a weight for so long a distance.

"I can't think, Jimmy," he said, "why your father didn't go to the station and fetch the salt himself. It's a big load for a little tacker to carry so far."

"They'm shutin' up to Zwittery to-morra," said the boy simply, "and vather said that he

must be round the cover to-night, for Major Raymond was coming to shute, and nothing mustn't go wrong when Major Raymond is out." The child spoke quite impersonally, evidently quoting his father's words, as though no such man as the Major were present.

Raymond was silent. Blackmore the elder was a night-watcher, and, of course, was paid to do his duty ; but here he was not only sacrificing his own night's rest, but setting his boy to an exhausting task in order that he, Raymond, might enjoy his day's shooting. He had been told by strangers that any man, woman or child in Northacott would do anything in the world for him, but, though he rejoiced in his rustic friends, he was humbled when they showed such blind devotion as this, and felt happy that, by mere chance, he had taken the fancy to walk home and so had been able to carry Jimmy's burden for him.

They were nearing Blackmore's cottage now, and he put his last question. " Is it a fine pig, Jimmy ? "

" Vather saith that he never put knife into a viner," answered Jimmy with enthusiasm.

" And did you collect the mast to feed him, Jimmy ? "

"Yas, bags and bags, beech-mast and oak-mast and all sorts," the boy said proudly.

"Good boy," said Raymond. He stopped at a gate within thirty yards of Blackmore's cottage. "Now, Jimmy, do you think that you can carry the salt the rest of the way? Here you are, then. Shall you be knapping to-morrow?"

Jimmy assented joyfully, for he loved knapping —that is to say, acting as a "stop"—because he had a sight of the sport.

"Very well, then, I shall see you to-morrow. Good night, Jimmy."

"Good night, sir, thank you," said Jimmy staidly; and Raymond, keeping himself out of sight, watched him staggering under his burden to the door, until his mother came out and took it from him. After all, he argued to himself, the boy has done his job and should receive credit for it. That he happened to meet me is an accident. He must have carried that load fully two hundred yards up the hill before I came upon him; and, if I hadn't come, he'd have stuck to it and got the salt home somehow, poor little beggar.

And then, as he walked to the Hall, he puzzled over the contradictions in the boy—his indomitable pluck in wrestling with a job beyond his

strength, the abject terror of water and pixies which made him add an unnecessary half-mile to his journey, and his absolute indifference to the churchyard and all its ghostly associations. The rustic on a bed of sickness, or in old age, awaits death with perfect composure, which would account for the contempt of the churchyard; but then why the dread of water, and why the tears of helplessness over any physical accident?

He could discover no solution, and found himself wondering whether the improvement in the soldier's lot, by good management of the canteen and otherwise, would ever remove the rural prejudice against the military profession. And honestly in his heart he thought not.

A BEGINNING AND AN END

The stag-hounds had had a great run from the southern edge of the moor almost to the sea, and unhappy riders, with beaten horses, were scattered far and wide on the line of the chase. Not a few drifted home along the road past the solitary cottage by Brynford Water, and some noted idly that there was no sign of life about it. But quite late in the evening a tall fair boy of sixteen, on a very good-looking little bay mare, rode up alone to the cottage door, dismounted and knocked. Receiving no answer, he gently opened the door and looked in. A solitary woman, dressed in black, was sitting in a chair in the middle of the parlour, with a hand on each knee, palms upwards, gazing vacantly at the fireplace in an attitude of utter despair. He closed the door gently, knocked again more loudly, and heard her start up and come to the door. Then he saw that she was very comely and neat, with soft brown hair and pathetic grey eyes, but so

pale, weary and worn-looking, that he was a little startled.

"Oh, missus," he said, "would you kindly let me have a bucket and a little hot water? We've had a very hard day, and I want to give my poor mare some gruel. A little cold water in the pail and the hot water in the kettle, or anything."

Something about the boy's manner seemed to interest her, for she smiled faintly, saying, "Oh yas, surely," and disappeared into the kitchen. Presently she came out with the pail and the kettle of hot water, and found him with his coat off and his right sleeve rolled up. He took a little bag of oatmeal off his saddle, shook it into the bucket, stirred it round with his hand, and then added the hot water gradually, stirring all the time, while the mare stamped and fretted impatiently behind him. "Steady, old lady, don't be in such a hurry," he said, as she brushed her nose against his arm. Very soon the mixture was to his liking; then, unbuckling the throat-lash, he slipped the bridle off and held up the pail, with "Now, old lady"; and the woman, watching, saw a great tenderness in his grey eyes as the mare buried her nose in the gruel and sucked it up to the last drop.

"She's thirsty, poor thing," she said. The boy turned a beaming face upon her which once again called up the faint smile.

"She's carried me like a wonder," he said; "haven't you, Diana?" and he fondled the ears of the still drooping head before he put on the bridle again. "I wonder if you would kindly give me a drop of water, for I'm thirsty too?"

"Yas," she answered, "plaze to come right in"; and he hitched his bridle over a post and entered the little parlour. It was much like any other cottage parlour, but somehow there was a feeling of dreariness and sorrow about it. He caught sight of a little child's frock on the chair where the woman had been sitting; but that told him nothing. Then it flashed across him that some one might be lying upstairs, sick, perhaps sick unto death; and his heart misgave him that he might have intruded himself tactlessly, when he was least wanted. The woman looked so ill and miserable. Then the mare pawed the ground without, impatient to be gone, and he hastened out to the doorway, glad of the excuse to quit the room. He had just taken the bridle over his arm when the woman brought him his glass of water. "Thank you, missus," he said, as he returned the glass empty; "I'm afraid—

I'm afraid that I've—I've—disturbed you when you are in trouble. I hope that no one is ill——"

The woman's face worked. "No," she said; "no—but my little boy——"

"What! that jolly little boy that I always saw when I passed on the road; I do hope there's nothing wrong with him."

"He's—dade," said the woman with an effort.

"Oh, no! no!" said the boy impulsively.

"He's dade," repeated the woman with a gulp—"scalded to death—I'd got out a pail of boiling water for washing—and I don't know how 'twas—I didn't leave mun half a minute—when I heard mun screech—and——" She stopped.

The boy's eyes, wide with horror, were filled with tears. "Poor, poor little chap!" he said, and then the woman broke down hopelessly, and he stared at her almost in terror. He had seen women cry before—they were always doing it—but never yet had he seen a grown-up person give way to uncontrollable grief. The woman recovered herself first.

"I ax pardon," she said, choking down her sobs. "I shouldn't have give way before a stranger, I know it," and at last she looked up, composed, and saw the boy's face wet with tears.

"I'm so sorry for you," he stammered out,

wiping his eyes, " so awfully, awfully sorry—I'm afraid I must be going now—I'm a long way from home—and—and I feel such a brute at having troubled you." He hid his awkwardness by catching up his reins.

" Oh, don't say naught about that," she said, " it's lonely, lonely here now."

He swung himself into the saddle, turned the impatient mare round and held out his hand. She took it awkwardly and ungracefully, as if half afraid of it. " Good-bye," he said, " and thank you very much. I'm—I'm so awfully sorry for you."

And he rode down the rough track into the road, turning to look at her with a smile before he passed out of sight, and was gone.

He felt strangely sad and depressed. He was returning from the best day's hunting that he had ever had in his life ; he had seen a great run from start to finish ; his mare had carried him like an angel ; he had been one of the half-dozen who alone had seen the deer turn to bay after a run of fourteen miles from point to point, and he had a slot of the stag in his pocket ; yet all pleasure was banished by the memory of that woman left alone all day with her sorrow in that bleak, solitary cottage. Her face haunted him,

and for three miles he rode along thinking of nothing else. Then the mare pricked her ears and hastened her walk, and presently he saw another horseman in front of him and trotted on, for he recognised the back of his father's agent, Mr. Mildon.

Mildon looked back and pulled up, a tall, keen-looking man with fair moustache and whiskers lightly sprinkled with grey. "Well, Mr. Raymond," he said, "tell me what you've done. I've met plenty of people who could tell me where you found, and that you had gone out over; but no one could tell me more. Now you can, I'll warrant."

"Killed in Wear Water," said the boy proudly, pulling out his slot, and the two discoursed for some time of every detail of the chase.

"A great run," said Mildon at last, "a great run—just like my luck not to be out. But business is business. Still, I'm happier that you should have gone well and seen every yard of it, Mr. Raymond, than if I had myself. Mare looks right enough too—I suppose you gave her some gruel."

"Yes," said the boy, suddenly becoming grave, "at that little cottage by Brynford Water. Mr. Mildon," he went on abruptly, "do you know anything about those people?"

"Their name is—wait a minute—Lythaby, yes, Lythaby, and a very nice, respectable, hard-working couple, I hear. He is a real sportsman by nature, though only a farmer's labourer. For a short time he was keeper with one of the little squires on the moor, but he and his lot were a bit too fast for a steady man like Lythaby, and I don't wonder. They are in great trouble, poor people, and I hear they want to move. Their little boy—you must have seen him passing the cottage—was scalded to death two or three weeks ago—a horrible thing—and I'm told that she can't bear the place since, poor soul."

Raymond was silent for a time, and then asked: "Mr. Mildon, Joe Gaydon is going, isn't he?"

"Yes," answered Mildon; "I'm sorry for Joe, but his lordship has discharged him, and quite rightly. He's got into bad company, and one can't have an under-gamekeeper going on as Joe has. I warned him, and it's his own fault. Very awkward time to have to get rid of a gamekeeper, but it can't be helped."

Again they rode on in silence, and then Raymond said, "I wonder if Lythaby would like to take Joe's place. Do you think he would do?"

Mildon looked at the boy hard. "I don't

know why he shouldn't," he said ; " I'll find out. It might be a great kindness. Are you interested in the Lythabys, Mr. Raymond ? "

" Only—only," stammered the boy, flushing, " that she told me about her boy, and—and—I felt awfully sorry for her."

Again Mildon looked at his companion. Raymond's lip was quivering, and there were curious stains about his face. Then Mildon looked again to his front and thought for a moment.

" Speak to his lordship about it yourself, Mr. Raymond," he said at last, in the tone of a man addressing one of his own age. " Talk it over with him ; and tell him that you've spoken to me, and that I am quietly making inquiries." And then, having reached the gate of the deer-park, they crossed the mile of grass together in silence, and parted.

II

" Mrs. Lythaby ! Mrs. Lythaby ! " The speaker tapped gently, though persistently, at the door of a little white cottage that abutted on an old and almost disused pack-road, and glanced through a gateway in a huge ash-grown bank beyond it at the blue tors of Dartmoor, thirty miles away. He listened, and was about to knock

again, when he heard the sound of footsteps within, and presently a latch clicked and a woman stood in the doorway. She was dressed in a bodice of blue-grey print with a skirt of coarse black stuff, a black shawl folded round her shoulders, and over her white hair was tied a spotless white muslin cap. She was thin and frail-looking, but her features showed that she had once been comely, and her grey eyes had not lost their brightness. She looked up anxiously into the face of the tall, slender man who towered over her.

"Mrs. Lythaby, don't you remember me?"

She caught his hand in both of hers, and wrung it. "Why, 'tis Mr. Dick, 'tis Mr. Dick. I could tell by the voice 'twas one of the young gentlemen, but 'tis long, long since I zeed 'ee, Mr. Dick. Oh! plaze to come right in, sir; plaze to come right in."

Dick hesitated. "I shan't disturb Will, shall I, Mrs. Lythaby? They tell me he's very ill."

"So he is, sir, vary, vary ill this long time—cancer, it is, the doctor saith, and he's waker and waker every day. But plaze to come in. You won't disturb mun upstairs. Plaze to come right in."

It was a typical cottage parlour, with its open fireplace, loud-ticking clock, shining brass candlesticks and gaudy-coloured earthenware figures of

blue-clad foresters with pink and white spaniels on the high mantel-shelf. All was scrupulously clean; and the only ornaments on the walls were two cheap coloured lithographs, obviously of German origin, representing the three persons of the Trinity and the death of Absalom.

"Plaze to sit down, Mr. Dick," said Mrs. Lythaby; "why, I didn't know you was come back, sir."

"Only came back last week, Mrs. Lythaby, after four years abroad; and there's been changes in those four years."

"Yas, indeed, sir," she said, "Captain Alfred gone, and now Major Raymond—two brothers gone—a sad home-coming vor 'ee. And how is his lordship, plaze, sir?"

"Well enough," answered Dick, "but getting up a very old man, and very feeble now. How long is it, Mrs. Lythaby, since you and Will came to Northacott?"

"Thirty years, Mr. Dick, thirty years since Mr. Raymond, as he was then, rode up to our place at Brynford Water—I can see mun now—such a fine young gentleman. We was in sad trouble then 'bout my little boy that we lost—and so gentle as he was—and 'twas he that told his lordship and got Will his place. Ah! 'twas

lonely up to Brynford—I've never had the heart to go there since, never since then."

Dick nodded. "Aye, I've heard tell of that," he said, "and I mind well when you first came. You lived up to Nethercott."

"Yas, we did," answered the woman, brightening up; "and well I mind the first time you came in there to lunch, shooting, all you young gentlemen, and Will so proud 'cause his lordship sent for him at the end of the day. 'Lythaby,' he said, 'you've given me the greatest satisfaction. We've had a rare day's sport.' Yas, his lordship said that to Will himself. Many, many times has Will told me of that. And, du you know, Mr. Dick, that his lordship wouldn't put us in to Nethercott till he had asked Will if it would pain me to hear the voices of Mrs. Skinner's children that was our neighbour there, because I had just lost my own little boy. Seven children she had, and fine children they was and gude too; but I reckon they'm all growed up and gone long ago. And I never had another baby since I lost that one to Brynford. Now who but his lordship would have thought of that?"

"His lordship likes every one about Northacott to be happy and content, if he can," said Dick.

"Happy! aye!" she answered. "Will was

never so happy as out with you young gentlemen. I mind so well all of you as boys with all your dogs, so gay—those was happy days—well, well !——" and she broke off with a sigh.

" How long is it since you left Northacott ? " asked Dick. " I was abroad then."

" Ten year agone," she said. " Will wouldn't never have left his lordship, if his lordship could have kept mun. But his lordship was gettin' old, and all of yu young gentlemen was away, and he reckoned that he didn't want so many men as he used. So he gave Will enough to start on a little place of his own, very kind he was to us ; and we come here—six acres we have—and we've done well till Will was took sick. And Captain Raymond—Captain he was then—come 'oom and come over to see us. Oh ! Will was happy to see mun again. Can 'ee tell me aught of Major Raymond, Mr. Dick ? Will keeps asking, for there was no one in the world like Major Raymond to him. We heard that he was killed two months agone in South Africa. Folks read us that on the newspaper, but no more."

" There's nothing more to tell, missus," said Dick ; " he was shot through the heart while leading his men—no pain, no suffering like poor Will—the way he always wished to die."

"Did he wish that?" said Mrs. Lythaby, as if doubting whether any gentleman with money in his pocket could wish to die at all. Dick felt this instinctively, but he only answered, "I think every soldier wishes the same, every soldier that I know, every officer at least."

"Well — it may be," said Mrs. Lythaby, giving up the puzzle as hopeless. "But Will says it isn't right that the like of Major Raymond should be shot down like a dog."

"Might I see Will?" asked Dick, to change the subject. And she led him up the little narrow stair into the bedroom. It was low but not dark, and from the window you looked across meadow and stubble and woodland, all smiling in the September sun, to Dartmoor. At one end was a broad low bed, covered with a patchwork quilt, above which rose a ghastly grey face with a tangle of white whisker from ear to ear, a few odd white wisps peeping from the back of a bald head, and a pair of great grey eyes wearing the patient, pathetic expression of a dog that has waited for long before a closed door. Beneath the quilt the outline showed the frame of a man of middle stature but great breadth of shoulder, who must, in his time, have possessed immense strength.

"Will," called Dick loudly, for he knew

that the man was hard of hearing, "Will Lythaby!"

The grey eyes travelled round slowly and sadly, and then lit up. "Why, it's Mr. Dick, it's Mr. Dick!" and two white claw-like hands struggled painfully from under the coverlet and closed, weak and trembling, over Dick's proffered hand. "I didn't think ever to zee one of the young gentlemen again."

"I've been in foreign parts, Will, these four years, and I'm only home for a week or two. It's sad to find you so sick, Will. Do you suffer much pain?"

"Not so much now, sir; but here I be—growing waker and waker—yu know what it is, sir—cancer inside—but I reckon 'tis the Lord's will," he ended stoutly.

"You'm terrible cold, Will!" said Dick, for the sick man still held his hand. "I told them to send you a thick flannel shirt and drawers of Major Raymond, that he left behind. Didn't they send them?" and the woman marked his lips tighten and the beginning of a frown on his brow.

"Oh, yas, yas," she said joyfully, hurrying to a chest, whence she tenderly produced the garments and displayed them; "but he's going to be buried in they, he's going to be buried in they."

And she gloated over them, like a bride over her wedding gown.

"Yas," echoed the sick man from the bed, smiling almost exultantly, "I'm going to be buried in they."

Dick was taken aback. He had sent over his dead brother's clothes merely to keep Lythaby warm; and here was a suffering man preferring to lie cold for days in order to reserve them for his own burial. But he made no sign, only nodded and smiled. "I'll send a couple of hot-water bottles up for him, missus. You know how to manage them; but be sure that you leave no water in the neck of them, or it will wet the bed-clothes. And now I must get back to his lordship and tell him that I've seen you. I go abroad again next week."

"Did 'ee walk over then, Mr. Dick?" asked Will.

"Yes, it is but five mile, Will. You didn't think much of five mile when you was forty years of age, no, nor of fifty mile for that matter."

"No, I reckon not," answered Will, smiling over the thought of his bygone strength; "and now—yurr I be—but 'tis the Lord's will. Well, I reckon I shan't zee 'ee again, Mr. Dick."

"I reckon not, Will," said Dick, answering the

sick man's manful question as manfully. " Good-bye, Will, and God bless 'ee. Don't come down, Mrs. Lythaby; I reckon Will wants you—good-bye." The sick man slowly released his hand, and Dick then shook that of the woman. She took up the flannel shirt and drawers again and repeated, beaming upon him, " He's going to be buried in they."

" Yas," once more echoed the voice from the bed triumphantly, " yas, I'm going to be buried in they."

And he left them smiling like two happy, quiet children over a promised treat.

A FAMILY BUTLER

Few figures, if indeed any, were more prominent at Northacott Hall than that of Mr. Hooper, the butler. He was born and bred in a cottage on the estate, being the son of the head gamekeeper, who was reputed to be the best trainer of dogs in general, and of pointers in particular, in the county. The boy was therefore brought up in an atmosphere of dogs and guns, and, if he had been allowed to choose his own vocation, would probably have followed that of his father with equal success. But his mother had visions of a different future for him. She and her husband were alike illiterate; but not so was to be her son. His lordship, towards the end of the eighteenth century, had founded a village school, and her ladyship, who acted as general superintendent and as a very watchful and constant inspector of the same, had never since ceased to exhort all parents to send their children thither. Lizzie Hooper,

who was a great favourite with her ladyship for her thrift, cleanliness and general ability, needed no such admonition. She packed her boy off to school betimes, and there he learned to write a tidy hand, to spell, to cast up accounts sufficiently for his needs and to read well enough for enjoyment. Thus it was that, when his father died, Lizzie begged her ladyship to admit the lad to the house; and her ladyship, after due inquiry, engaged him as hall-boy when he was little more than fifteen. Young Hooper himself would much have preferred outdoor work; but, when her ladyship and his mother combined in a contrary direction, he was bound to obey.

So to the Hall he went as drudge to a kindly old butler of the old school. The house was then rather a sad one, for the old lord, after a reign of over fifty years, was failing and feeble. After blacking his boots, among other functions, for a couple of years, young Hooper followed the old man to a gorgeous funeral in the family vault, and passed, as footman, into the service of his successor. After a few years of this work he attracted the attention of his successor's heir, who, upon his marriage, took him away first as his valet, from which post he was shortly afterwards promoted to be butler. It was during

these years that Hooper was tested to the utmost. The foundation of his master's family was laid in the first year, and the superstructure grew by regular additions every twelve months. It had reached the number of seven when his master fell sick and was ordered abroad for three successive winters. The whole therefore took ship for a subtropical island; and upon Hooper fell the entire burden of the arrangements. Moreover, though the family numbered seven when it left England for the first time, it returned numbering eight after this first winter, nine after the second and ten after the third. People of means travelled comfortably in those days; and as, of course, each child had secured some treasure, living or dead, which must be brought home at all costs, the number of the family packages was appalling. It was upon one of these journeys that Hooper made the only mistake of his life. When the luggage was finally unloaded in England, only eighty-nine pieces were forthcoming instead of ninety. The missing article was of no importance, but Hooper, though he said nothing, and no one dreamed of blaming him, reproached himself a good deal. For the rest, he got on well with foreigners and picked up some little knowledge of French.

He had served three generations of the family for about twenty-two years in all when he was called upon to attend a second great funeral in the family vault, and his master succeeded to the possession of Northacott, where Hooper was to become so important a figure. He was now a year or two under forty, but in spite of extreme abstemiousness in food and drink — he never touched beer, and rarely intoxicating liquor of any kind—and as much exercise as his duties permitted him, he was already growing portly. He stood about five feet ten and was disproportionately broad, with huge limbs and great muscular strength. He was very bald, but such hair as remained was black, touched with grey, as were also the large bushy whiskers which were characteristic of the time. His face was rather round, with a slightly concave nose, firm chin, kindly mouth, and vigilant, humorous grey eyes. His complexion, as clear as a baby's, bore testimony to the land of his birth and to the healthiness of his life. Despite of his great bulk, for he must have weighed sixteen stones, he moved quietly without moving stealthily, and, like many other big men, danced as lightly as a feather. Wherever he went, he carried with him an atmosphere of cheerfulness, amiability and repose. He had

always a smile for his fellow-creatures, and few could help returning it.

The place of such a man is not an easy one. Northacott was not a palace like Wentworth or Welbeck, being no more than a large rambling white house, rebuilt in early Georgian days, which at times of pressure had occasionally, with tight packing, found sleeping accommodation for one hundred souls. None the less, it is not a simple matter to make even from twenty to five-and-twenty men and women work in harmony—let any one try it who doubts the fact—; and a large family means nurseries, nurses and nursemaids, schoolrooms and schoolroom-maids, foreign governesses and tutors, and every complication that can try the patience and upset the equilibrium of housekeeper's room, hall and kitchen. Yet under Hooper's government all went smoothly. Perhaps the fact that a large proportion of his fellow-servants had been bred, like himself, on the estate, or came from within a radius of ten miles around it, was of some help to him ; but the main factors in his success were his gentleness, his courtesy and his tact. He addressed the under-scullery-maid or the hall-boy in the same accents as the housekeeper, and a few quiet words from him averted or composed all quarrels. On one

occasion at a servants' ball he noticed that the under-scullery-maid was going partnerless for much of the evening. He promptly went up and asked her to dance with him. The trembling girl, quite overwhelmed, could only ejaculate "Oh, *sir*!" before he led her out, and, treating her with the same courtesy as if she had been a daughter of the house, made her the very happiest little maid in the room.

He could be stern enough upon occasion. The first instance of drunkenness was with him the last, and he was little more lenient towards idleness or grumbling. His great physical strength added point to his rebukes when he was concerned with one of his own sex, for he could have thrown any ordinary man out of the window. But he believed in gentleness, and his influence spread the gospel of gentleness all through the house and outside it. Fathers loved to send their sons to him to be trained, and more than one of his hall-boys now hold much such a position as he held at Northacott. Though he never spared his underlings in the way of work, he would never allow their strength to be overtaxed; and more than one visitor, when leaving the house, saw, almost with awe, the great Mr. Hooper take a heavy portmanteau from two struggling footmen and

toss it up to the top of a carriage without an effort, single-handed. In two words, he had a marvellous knack of easing friction, forestalling complaints and inspiring loyalty upon all sides.

Another point upon which he was equally strong was the duty of all towards visitors to the house. From the highest to the lowest, they were his master's guests, and as such must be made welcome. When railways as yet were not, country hospitality in England was much like that which we now so much admire in the Colonies. Some county magnates of great wealth simply kept open house; but others, who were not so great in possessions as they, never refused hospitality to any in trouble on the road. At Northacott it had been the custom for every coach to stop before the house, and for the passengers to consume as much toast and ale, the latter hot and spiced in winter, as they would; and, though the road had been diverted before Hooper's time, and the coaches had vanished, the tradition of such friendly intercourse still survived. Moreover, it was still the custom for all relations of the family to pay a visit to its head every year and to stay sometimes, in belated recollection of the days when travelling was difficult, for several weeks. Hooper knew the exact degree of kinship in

every case. He recollected their likes and dislikes, their whims and their idiosyncrasies, and made each one feel that he or she was under special protection. Any guest, whether it were a duke or a poor parson, was studied in the same way ; and he showed precisely the same courteous deference to a tutor or a governess as to a son or a daughter of the house. If a total abstainer were among the guests, there was no occasion to tell Hooper. He had found it out for himself, refrained from offering wine, and had some harmless drink ready. He always ascertained somehow exactly the right appellation for every guest, and whether he had to deal with foreign nobles, foreign ambassadors, foreign ministers, or the chief of a Highland clan, he never made a mistake himself, and took care that others should make no mistake. People might think this a small matter ; but it was Hooper's ideal of hospitality that nothing, not even a wrong title, should make a guest feel for the moment that he was not at home.

Below stairs he was equally thoughtful and equally courteous. Poor rough men, who came into the Hall to see his lordship, were often dazed at the aspect of the biggest house and the biggest rooms that they had ever set eyes on ; and then

Hooper did his utmost to quiet their nervousness and set them at their ease. Sometimes one of these from a distance, being given some dinner before he started on a long walk home, would be so much awed by the spotlessness of the servants' hall, the shining pewter on which his meat was set out and the general grandeur of his surroundings, that he hardly dared pick up his knife and fork. And then Hooper, having previously taken stock of his man, would come in with, "Why, John Smith, you'm not touching your dinner. Be you afraid to eat it? You'm hungry enough, I warrant. Come, man, pick up your knife and fork and get to work. What would your missus say to me if I sent you home to her with nothing in you?" Through such little acts of kindness as this he became widely known as a good friend. Humble men and women from all parts of the estate carried their troubles to him, and were sure, unless those troubles were due to their own fault and folly, of sympathy, of help or of good advice. But he never presumed to arrogate powers that were not rightly his. "Go to his lordship," he would say; "you know he is always ready to hear every one."

With such instincts of loyalty, it need not be said that he worked heartily with all other depart-

PUBLIC CENTRAL

ments, doing his utmost to make everything easy and smooth for them, without jealousy and without carping. Of the stable he was particularly fond, partly because the head of it was just such another in industry, loyalty and efficiency as himself, partly because he himself had a great weakness for a horse. Not that he cared about racing, or ever dreamed of betting. With such matters he had no concern; but a hunter was his delight, and he knew every animal in the stable as a friend. No man could lift a lady into the saddle more gracefully, easily and deftly than Hooper. When the fox-hounds met at the house, he was in his element. He always carried out refreshments to the hunt servants with his own hands, for the huntsman was a particular friend, so as to have an opportunity of standing among the pack. He knew their horses too, and had even some old friends among the hounds; and, if he saw a new face among the whips, he would welcome the lad with a kind word or two as he poured him out a glass of the beer, brewed by himself, for which he was famous. He was proud of recording that at one lawn-meet, the guests consumed ninety-three quarts of small beer and twenty-two of ale, which he took as a high compliment to himself.

When it came to entertaining on a large scale, his powers of organisation were remarkable, whether in London or in the country. There was no agitation, no hurrying. Everything had been thought out, and things went forward with placid cheerfulness and without a hitch. In the mere routine of his business he was perfect. At table his eye was everywhere, and he responded to the slightest sign. Not a glass was allowed to remain empty for a moment, unless by the owner's wish, and all individual likes and dislikes were instantly noted and remembered. Sometimes, by way of tacit rebuke, he would give his underlings a lesson in the art of waiting at table, an art which needs a great variety of moral and physical qualities, most delicately balanced, if it is to be, as in his case, carried to perfection. At times of stress—as, for instance, when the house was unexpectedly invaded by a hunting-field—his quiet resource was marvellous, and his physical strength stood him in good stead. He would bend over a table, with astonishingly small inconvenience to those sitting at it, put forth one mighty arm and lift a full-sized cold round of beef from the middle of it over all heads without an effort; and he would pour out beer from immense vessels, artistically putting a head on

each glass, without spilling a drop. Yet he never betrayed the slightest outward sign of any exertion.

It was in his dealings with the boys of the family, however, that he was seen at his happiest, in every sense. There was a long row of these, and they were no sooner emancipated from female authority than they drifted by attraction to him. Of course they had all known him and loved him from infancy, but it was in the days of going to school, which they did very young, and of returning thence through London, that they first grew to know Hooper intimately. There is no greater nuisance in London than country-bred small boys, for whom occupation must somehow be provided for a day or two; and the Northacott boys, on such occasions, were always made over to Hooper. He was always perfectly dressed, in clothes that, though quiet, were extremely well cut; and, arraying himself very smartly, he would sally forth with two or three of the sons of the family to show them London. He knew every quarter of the town almost as well as he knew Northacott, and seemed to have friends everywhere. He would lead the boys from sight to sight, one stage in a hansom, another on the knife-board of a 'bus, another in a penny steamer, another in the underground, and

pilot them through obscure alleys into the most unexpected corners. If on the way they passed some uncontemplated place of entertainment and the boys craved to go in, he yielded directly and in they went. He enjoyed it all as much as they did, and was perfectly happy so long as they were. The one thing that he discouraged was the spending of their money upon the first object that occurred to them. "Want a flower, sir?" he would say, as they perambulated Covent Garden market; "don't buy one. I'll beg you one from a friend of mine"; and the friend produced the flower with the greatest joy and gratification, for every one was delighted to see Mr. Hooper. Incidentally, he quietly contrived, by example rather than precept, to combine a little training with these outings. He always insisted that the boys in all places and conveyances should give way to their elders; and the courteous kindness with which he helped stout old women, frightened girls, or even overloaded errand boys, in or out of a 'bus was a lesson in itself. Wherever he went he conversed with the people in charge—vergers, warders, guides, 'bus-drivers—learned something of their lives and left them with a pleasant word of thanks; and on the way home he would make the boys repeat after him the

whole of their itinerary so that they might have the satisfaction of telling their friends all about it.

Sometimes Hooper was delegated to take one or more boys to a play, which was the greatest joy of all. To go with Hooper to the pit, as compared with going with the family to a box, was as daylight to gaslight. In the first place they were conscious that, wherever he went, Hooper dominated the pit. This of course seemed to them natural in so great a man ; but it was a fact, and a fact due to no arrogant assumption of authority, but to silent influence and force of character. He was particularly fond of the Bancrofts' little theatre in Tottenham Court Road, where Robertson's plays with the monosyllabic titles were then running, and was delighted to find that the boys took to it also. He was very warm always in his applause ; and more actors and actresses owed an additional " round " to Mr. Hooper than they knew. Once he astonished the boys by leading a hiss with unmistakable earnestness and power. It was at Astley's Amphitheatre on the Surrey side. An acrobat had gone through an exhausting feat of strength once and, in response to loud appeals, a second time. Part of the audience clamoured for a third repetition ; and then Mr. Hooper rose to his feet and emitted a hiss of such

menace and volume as silenced the applauders. "They don't care if they kill the man," he ejaculated loud enough to be overheard all round him. "They don't think of his wife and children." So the acrobat, who had been hesitating, retired with a look of evident relief, and the boys received their first lesson in consideration for hard-worked servants of the public.

But as the boys grew older they resorted the more to Hooper at Northacott, for to him they were entrusted for their first training in the use of a gun. Here he was quite excellent, for he had been his master's loader in the muzzle-loading days; he had seen a certain number of accidents (fingers shot off and the like), and had been once badly peppered himself. The younger his pupils were when beginning, the better he was pleased, for he was the surer of controlling them thoroughly and of making them safe shots. Then when care had become a second nature with them, he became as keen as they that they should become good shots, and did not hesitate on the sly to find for them outlying pheasants and partridges which, holding no game-licence, they had no legal right to slay; and when the latest learner killed his first flying partridge or pheasant he would dash his hat on the ground and cry

aloud with delight. Here too he combined other training. He had generally a retriever puppy in hand, and lessons to puppies and to boys go well together. He always kept a dog or two of some kind, and one had only to observe his patience in teaching them to understand their devotion to him. Furthermore, on these walks of instruction he taught the boys their way over the estate, gave them the names and the boundaries of the farms, and pointed out to them all the prominent landmarks of the country. Lastly, he schooled them in the way of never allowing any man, woman or child to pass them without a smile and a word of greeting, and of always observing good workmen at their work. " Look," he would say, when they came to a group of tree-fellers, " they will drop this tree just between those two, within a yard of both of them, and won't hurt either. Watch John Heaman putting in the wedges." And John Heaman would kick a wedge in, to all appearance anyhow, and throw his tree to an inch, not ill-pleased that a young one of the family should be a witness of his skill.

Thus it came about that the friend with whom they frequently corresponded at school, whom they rushed to greet upon their return home, and to whom they resorted at all times, was Hooper.

But he was not the man to presume upon their adoration. He never wrote them a letter that did not open with "Honoured Sir," nor addressed them with anything approaching to familiarity. None the less, he enforced discipline. If a boy came into luncheon with dirty hands and untidy hair, Hooper would quietly take possession of his chair, smiling blandly, and refuse to surrender it until the hands had been washed and the hair brushed. Nor would he grant to them a minute of his time until his other duties had been fulfilled to the last detail. He would toil on laboriously at the house-accounts with the boys outside yelling for him to come out, and all the dogs adding their voices to the clamour; but not until the two final lines had been neatly ruled would he jump into his shooting-clothes to join them. Then he was ready for anything, whether it were to ferret a corn-stack for rats, or a bank for rabbits; to dig out a badger, or to take out the latest pupil for his first day's partridge-shooting. Any form of sport was welcome to him, especially in company with the boys.

As they grew up he marked their advance in years by a subtle change in the manner of his address, recognising that tails and stick-up collars were not the same thing as jackets and Eton

collars ; but the old friendship was intensified rather than diminished. When they reached manhood, they sought him not unfrequently as a counsellor, for he too had been young and understood the follies of youth. And then they began to join regiments and to seek professions and were speedily dispersed all over the world. Before the youngest of the seven had reached the age of sixteen there came a year when not one of them was at home. Meanwhile marriage had already thinned the number of the young ladies, and on these occasions Hooper always produced a wedding-present, costly and in excellent taste. At length the heir married also, and in due time his heir came into the world. Hooper one day seized his little bits of black shoes, carried them off and returned with them beaming, to report that he had now blacked the shoes of five generations at Northacott.

But times were changing. Agricultural depression, as it is called, declared itself unmercifully in one year of ceaseless rain, when murrain broke forth among sheep and oxen, and the corn-stooks were still rotting uncarried in December. Wheat fell below twenty shillings a quarter, owing to the competition of virgin soil in new countries, and thousands of farmers and lesser country

squires were ruined. The very fox-hunting fields shrank to a tenth of their old dimensions. It was necessary to reduce expenses at Northacott and to shut up a great part of the house. Hooper accepted the situation cheerfully, and went on as usual. He was now, though as yet it was known to very few, a wealthy man for his station. When quite a young fellow some windfall had come to him, which a fortunate speculation had increased manifold. Through one of his many friends he had always access to the best advice in the matter of investments ; and, thanks to steady thrift and mere accumulation, his fortune was already counted by thousands of pounds. Yet it never occurred to him to desert the family or to cease to serve them. Even if he had been the only servant left, he would have remained with them alone and done cheerfully, if he had been permitted, the work of all.

Moreover, there were compensations even though the house was now quiet and half empty. His young gentlemen returned from time to time from distant employments and tropical campaigns, and they always flew to him as before. On very rare occasions as many as four might be there together, and now, when the reduction of the establishment left him greater leisure, they in-

sisted that he must come out shooting with them. He was not a bad shot, and was astonishingly keen and active ; and as, when they thus found themselves together, they became boys again, he became very much of a boy with them. Moreover, real boys of a new generation now began to appear at Northacott ; and the old guns of the " young gentlemen " were brought out, and Hooper trained the sons as he had trained their fathers. He still occasionally borrowed a horse, and stole out for a day with the hounds, moving cunningly from point to point and seeing as much of the sport as most men in that worst of hunting countries. In spite of many changes and much glory departed, these were still happy days for him.

So time went on and more changes came with it. The faithful henchman, who had for years helped him to brew the beer, departed this life, and it was decided that private brewing was obsolete and that the brew-house must be closed. Old friends dropped off one by one. The young gentlemen flitted over sea again, and some of them never came back. His old master was now rising to a great age and becoming infirm ; and, though he was still happier in the saddle than anywhere else, it pained Hooper to watch his

difficulty in mounting. Hooper himself began to show signs of age—a little shakiness in the legs—though his eye was still bright and his complexion still that of a child ; but he was yet, as always, the mainstay of the family, and the refuge of all in sorrow and difficulty.

At length the permanent residents at Northacott were reduced to two, his master and one daughter ; and with them, one spring, Hooper went up as usual to London. One day he reported a slight accidental injury to his foot, and when it was proposed that, in order to ensure speedy recovery, he had better go to bed, Hooper, who had never yet been known to be sick or sorry, to the general surprise and the general relief, raised no objection. For a day or two he was well and cheerful and talked of being soon on his legs again ; and then he became thoughtful. Suddenly, some quite unsuspected internal disorder declared itself, and in forty-eight hours he sank and died. He had served the family faithfully for nearly sixty years, and was gone to his rest.

So he was borne away to Northacott, where he was laid in the churchyard looking towards the house where he had lived so long and which he had loved so well. Old friends carried the coffin,

among them the only two of his "young gentlemen" who were in England; and the church was filled with a great concourse of mourners of all conditions, lamenting that never again would they see the like of Mr. Hooper. He left everything in perfect order. His money he bequeathed in equal portions to three old fellow-servants at Northacott; and among his few papers was one very neat packet containing the letters that the boys had written to him from school, and, very carefully laid up, two rhyming epitaphs that one of them had composed at the age of fourteen upon two of his dogs. He was the best friend that ever they had; and they know it, and cherish his memory.

THE OLD ONE-HORNED STAG

He was dropped, as I reckon, early in the month of June, about the year 1874, probably in some quiet retreat under the oak coppice of Horner Wood, or it may have been in some shady combe full of grass and fern on Brendon Common. Who shall presume, unless by rare chance he may have assisted at the ceremony, to name the day and place of birth of a wild red deer? Yet if the knowledge of the ways of deer be not vain, and all experience of teeth and head and slot be not at fault, my conjecture will not lead us very far from the truth. So he came into the world, a downy-haired, white-spotted little red deer calf, with four rather long legs and two rather large ears, and looked about him with two great beautiful eyes, and saw his heritage of Exmoor before him, fold upon fold of grass and heather with the shadows of the clouds coursing over it, bounded on the one hand by the blue sky and on the other by the blue sea. A peaceful, happy world it must

have seemed to him in those early months, singularly full for the moment of heedless young creatures like himself. Now he would see an old vixen with her cubs around her playing merrily, as only fox-cubs can play, and hunting distracted beetles among the stones ; now a sober old grey hen, much cumbered with the cares of maternity, watching anxiously over her brood of little poults ; now a bloodthirsty old weasel with two couple of young weasels behind her, all hurrying forward with little, short legs and long, lithe bodies on the line of some hapless rabbit, and speaking joyfully to the scent as they ran. Sometimes, when walking leisurely among the burning stones on the sunny combe side, his dam would stop and swerve and stamp, and lay back her ears and look fierce, and he would see the old mother viper open her hideous wicked jaws, and the little vipers rush down her throat to their haven of refuge. Nay, even when she took him with her to the brown peat stream the trout-fry dashed away from the shallows before him, and he could watch them scurrying from stone to stone, half in fright and half in play. For all the world was young in those days, and all the young, except the trout, seemed to have a kind mother to look after them.

So passed the long, bright midsummer days.

The sun came up over Dunkery, and the light flew away on the wings of the morning along the Severn sea to the Atlantic, and the warm wind sang through the waving grass and the stiff, stubborn heather, and made the music of the moor. And the calf grew and waxed stronger and began to see others of his kind, other hinds like his own loving dam, with other calves like unto himself. And with these calves he would play, frisking and gambolling and pretending to fight ; nor could he fail to note that some would submit to him at once, while others would butt and push and worry with great enjoyment. Now and again he would see a huge old stag, his head half grown and the velvet black with flies, stamping and twitching and wincing under his tiny tormentors, in piteous anxiety for the safety of the young tender horn. And our calf, too, whisked his little ears and tossed his little head with great dignity, and stretched himself lazily when he rose from his bed as he had seen the old stags do ; for he too meant to grow into a great stag one day, and it is always good to be of the male sex. Then his attention would be distracted by a shrill whistle overhead, and he would be aware of a pair of curlews sailing high in air, with their long bills cut clear against the blue sky, reminding

him of the herons that he had seen in Badgworthy Water. Then another bird would cross his view, a little speck with wings that fluttered and paused and fluttered and paused ; and he wondered why the old grey hen, with whom he had been on most friendly terms, now cut him dead, having no eyes but for the speck above her, while the poults hid themselves away in abject terror.

One day he was startled from his play by an unusually sharp bleat from his mother, who came galloping in haste to meet him, and kept watching a mass of something white that was moving over the heather across the combe a mile away. Never had he seen her so much disturbed ; and he felt uneasy too, though he hardly knew why, and as they moved upward towards them his nostrils caught a new strange scent which some instinct within him bade him take note of. The mass kept closely and compactly together until it reached the spot where he remembered to have passed in the morning, and then he saw a man on a horse gallop forward, and faintly heard a shrill yelp that made his dam quiver all over. She was doubly thoughtful and affectionate for the rest of the day, and that night they travelled farther than they had ever travelled yet, away to the south and west, and found a resting-place

where few even of their own kind ever visited them. But there were thoughtful heads among the moving white mass of hounds also. Fisherman and Reveller and Nemesis and other grey-muzzled veterans were rejoicing that those tiresome, idiotic puppies had at last learned to follow the pack without being coupled to them; and Chorister, still smarting under the lash, was bewailing his hard lot and wondering why, now that he was entering upon his second season, he could not be allowed a free hand. He had been hunting hinds strenuously all the winter; why should he now be punished for feathering on the stale line of a hind and calf?

So the summer wore on, and August came in with bursts of westerly wind and mist and rain. And the water sank rustling into the turf and dripped from the ragged edges of the peat basin in a rich brown clear stream. The trout felt it and rejoiced, and the salmon rushed up from the sea into the Lyn; but the hind and her calf rested peacefully in the shade of the oak coppice, and, when they moved, he watched her rear up to pluck some dainty piece of ivy or the red berries of the mountain-ash, and nuzzled at the fragments between her lips and pretended to enjoy them immensely. But one fine day, very early in the

morning, just when they were settling down to be comfortable for the day, there came the sound of many hounds raising a terrible clamour, and they rose and moved up from the covert to the open. And after a time out came one of the fox-cubs that they had known on the moor, his tongue lolling and his back crooked, as though he began to tire. He went up as if he would have gone away over the moor, but presently stopped and flounced back with desperation into the covert; and the hind trotted gently away, anxious, but not alarmed. "They are not after us, my son," she gave the calf to understand; and presently out came the hounds furiously on the line of the cub and flashed over the scent for fifty yards. Then the clamour died away and they spread out in all directions; and two wild puppies, catching the line of the hind and calf, lifted up their voices and began to run on. The rest had cast back, and, recovering the line of the cub, disappeared with a chorus into the oak-coppice; but the two puppies, rejoicing in a stronger scent, ran on, and hind and calf fled before them. The calf's poor little legs were beginning to weary when he found himself poked down quick as thought into a tuft of fern by his dam's nose. "Lie there, my son, till I come

back to you," was her order; and there he lay, helpless and alone.

Closer and closer came the puppies, loudly throwing their foolish tongues and thinking themselves immensely clever; but they missed his hiding-place and passed beyond him, though he did not know that his dam had waited for them on purpose to lead them after herself. Presently came the brushing of a horse's hoofs through the heather, and a mounted man galloped almost on to the top of him. He saw the horse swerve and heard the man's exclamation of surprise, but he lay still as he had been bidden. Then the dull drum of hoofs died away, and after a time a melancholy yelping, such as he had once heard before, was borne to his ears, and he again perceived the approach of horses. Then there was a noise of human voices. "Where did you say she had left her calf, Tom?" "Straight afore you, sir, about ten landyard on, where you see the veearn." Then two horses came closer, and a girl's voice said: "What a little duck! I wish I could take him home." And a man's voice answered: "His mother will come and take him home presently, and the sooner we are gone the better she will be pleased." So the girl took a last regretful look, and they rode down into the

covert; and in the silence that followed he heard a roar of baying, and the shrill notes of a horn and hallooing from the valley, but he did not know that it meant that the cub was dead, and that the man who had so nearly galloped on to him was even then fastening the ghastly mask to his saddle.

Before very long, though it seemed very long to him, his dam came back and rejoiced over him. She was dripping all over, having taken a good bath at the end of her run; and she led him quietly off for a little way over the heather, and then down a steep hill-side among stunted gorse and hot loose stones. "No scent here, my son," was the lesson that she wished to teach, and he learned it once for all. Then, when they reached the water at the foot of the hill, she led him down the shallow for a little way, and jumped out on to the bank and followed it for a few yards; and then she jumped in again and went upstream till they came to a comfortable shady spot; and there they left the water and lay down together. On that night they did not return to their former place, but travelled till they came to the cliffs overhanging the sea, and made their home in the coverts there. But the place that they liked best was a large plantation of Scotch

firs, so closely cropped by the wind and the salt that they ran along the ground almost like ivy.

One morning late in September, long after they had settled down for the day, they heard continuous and increasing trampling of hoofs on the road half a mile above them, and a great chattering of human voices. It lasted for a long time, but they lay quite still, though the hind was evidently uneasy. Then they heard hounds speak in the covert below them, and there was a shrill halloo and much blowing of horns ; and presently there came a great clatter of branches close to them, and up came a huge old stag with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back. He jerked his head impatiently forward, as if to say, " Be off at once," and the hind jumped up in terror and the calf after her ; and as they went they saw the old stag lie down in their place with his horns thrown back on his shoulders and his chin tight against the ground. But they had no time to lose, for the hounds were coming closer, and presently the hind led the calf on to a path, for his little legs could not keep up with hers in the tangle of the plantation, and there they ran on till they heard a horse trotting down the path towards them. Then they turned into the covert

and lay down ; but the man hastened on along the path, looking hard at the ground, and meeting the hounds stopped them at once. " What is it, Arthur ? " said a man's voice. " Hind and calf, sir," said the man who had stopped the hounds, and then he blew a note on his horn and went away with the hounds, just three couple of them, at his heels.

" Hind and calf ? " said a girl's voice, the same that they had once heard before ; " I thought we were hunting a stag. We certainly found one." " Just so," answered the man, whose voice also was not strange ; " but the stag has turned up the hind and calf to be hunted instead of him." " Do they often do that ? " said the girl. " It's the commonest of all their tricks, as you'll know when you have hunted them a little longer. They will turn out any deer that is weaker than themselves to take their place." " And a hind is always weaker, I suppose ? " continued the girl. " Naturally, for she is only about three-quarters of the size of a big stag." " Dear me," said the girl, " the stags make the hinds do all their dirty work for them. I really had thought better of them. Stags are very like men, it seems," she added with a little sigh. " Yes, they are incomparably

superior to the hinds," said the man gravely. "More strength, more beauty and more brains." "I don't——" began the girl hotly, but the man held up his hand and said, "Hark! what have they found now?" Then the cry of hounds rose up again, and presently a hornless deer passed close to them, flying like an arrow from the bow. "There!" said the girl triumphantly, "that was a hind. Do you mean to tell me that she is not twice as handsome and graceful as a heavy, lumbering old stag?" "Far more graceful, no doubt," said the man drily; "but it happened to be a young male deer, as you might have judged by his neck and action, and I am going to stop the tufters from him," and he drew up his reins in his hand, for he had dismounted. "He's much nicer than the old stag, anyhow," persisted the girl, with a touch of temper. "Stags cannot be very like men," said the man bitterly, as he swung himself into the saddle, "if the young ones are much nicer than the old; but hinds are very like women, for it is well known that they prefer the old ones." And he looked at her rather sadly for a moment, before starting off abruptly at a gallop. "But I don't," said the girl, stretching out her hand as if to stop him. "I don't," she repeated, galloping after him at

the top of her horse's speed ; and the voices died away.

But the hind and the calf lay still though they could hear men and hounds still wandering through the great covert, hunting for their lost stag. Then after a time there was another loud halloo, which told them that he was afoot again, and when another half-hour was past there was a great clamour in the road above them, and all the horses seemed to be galloping to one spot. Then the hubbub died away and all was silent ; the old stag had been forced into the open at last, and was flying for his life over the heather. And presently the hind rose and led the calf out of the covert and on to the open moor ; and, when they had crossed one valley and reached the top of the hill above, they could see a long line of horses, covering two or three miles, hastening on with what speed they could muster in the vain hope of catching the hounds. There they lay down in peace for two hours, and as the sun began to sink they saw the hounds, far away, returning quietly home ; and very weary the horses that were with them seemed to be. Then they heard voices much closer to them, and the hind started to her feet. It was the man and the girl that they had seen in the morning ; they

were riding quite alone and were very close together, and they seemed to have a great deal to say to each other. The pair drew nearer, and they heard the girl say: "He's not so very old, and you'll admit that he's very nice; but how you can have thought that I really cared for him——" And the man looked about him rather foolishly, but very happy apparently, and changed the conversation by saying, "Look! there's a hind and a calf." And she said, "I believe you are a great deal fonder of the deer than you are of me"; and so they passed on. And later on came a loose horse, all covered with mire, with one stirrup missing from his saddle. And first he went down to the water to drink, and then he lay down and rolled over and over till the girths parted with a crack and left the saddle on the ground; then he got up, hung up one hind-leg in the rein and kicked himself free, and then he lay down once more and rubbed his cheeks against the heather till he had forced the bridle off his head, and at last, apparently quite comfortable, he began to graze. And some time after him came a man, also covered all over with mire, tramping wearily through the heather in his breeches and boots, with his spurs in his hand; and he stumbled over a tussock of grass and

nearly fell on his nose. And they heard him curse the moor as a place abandoned of Providence and wish that he had never set eyes on it ; and then he too passed on, and so closed an eventful day.

After another week or so, as October came in, the stillness of the night was broken by hideous roars, at first in a few places only, but soon from all sides, and all the deer in the forest appeared to be incurably restless. The great stags seemed never to cease belling except when they were cooling themselves in the water or taking a mud bath, and if two of them met they fought furiously. Their necks were swelled and their bodies tucked up, so that they looked very different from the sleek fat creatures that had been seen in the coverts in the summer. And one would form a little band of hinds to himself and drive them about like sheep, and another, perhaps some impudent three-year-old, would try to steal one of them away, till the old stag came down upon him in all his wrath and drove him to fly for his life. The calf felt very much afraid of the old stags at this time, but his mother took care to keep him out of their way. After two or three weeks of this troubled life, the deer seemed to agree to live in peace again, and they drew together in great

herds, so that sometimes there would be two or three score of them on Dunkery alone.

And now the autumn gales set in and blew furiously from the Atlantic over the moor; and the calf grew stronger and stronger, and noted with pride that the white spots which had dotted his summer coat had disappeared, and that he was now a veritable red deer. Week after week he lay with his dam in the warm sheltered combes of Dunkery, and listened to the gale hunting the scud overhead, and the water roaring down from the bog to the sea. On very rough days there was always plenty of company in these combes, for a fox would often come in and make himself comfortable therein, and occasionally a hare; and all seemed to be equally fond of the place. But there was little rest, for the hounds ran over Dunkery from all parts of the moor regularly week after week, and many a time the hind and calf were forced to fly before them, sometimes alone and sometimes with others. And they had narrow escapes, too, for they were hard pressed more than once, and at last in January there came a day when they were forced to part from each other, and run their own ways. Worse than that, the pack divided after them, and some of the old hounds, knowing that a calf was more easily tired

than a hind, chased him their hardest. He ran gallantly for more than half an hour in and about the large wooded valleys, but the scent was good and the pace so great, that he dared not pause for a drink and a splash in the water; and though he beat up one little stream for a few yards he soon left it, for he heard the hounds close to him. Then he made a final effort, and climbing up one hill-side and down another, sank the hill to the water below and lay down in despair. But chance was kind to him; for just as the hounds were casting down the water after him, a man viewed him in the stream, and the hounds were stopped and laid on to another line.

Then the men came back and stood over him, and one said: "The pack is all over the place; hadn't we better stow the little beggar away somewhere, or they'll kill him yet?" And the other said, "Hold my horse, and I'll go in after him." And he did go in after him, but the calf was not so beat but that he scrambled up and made his escape down the water and into a hedge-trough, where he lay like a stone. All that day hounds were running round and round the great woods, and deer after deer, stags and hinds, came down the same water with a few hounds after them, until at last, as it grew dark, a tired man on

a tired horse rode slowly up the valley blowing long notes on a horn and picking up couple after couple of the weary pack. But when night came on there was still a stray puppy mooning up and down the valley, howling dismally from time to time that he was lost and did not know his way home, until at length he licked himself dry, and came sniffing along the hedge-trough, where the calf lay, to look for a warm bed. And when he reached the calf he just stepped down and curled up alongside him ; and the two kept each other warm for the night.[1]

Next day his dam found him, and she too seemed stiff and tired as though she had travelled far and fast on the previous day. They ran together many times before the hounds ere the hunting-season ceased ; but all things come to an end, and at last, in March, the coverts were quiet and they could enjoy a peaceful life once more. Then the sun gathered strength and the thorns began to sprout and the mountain-ash to flower, and the woods were carpeted with wild hyacinth and primrose ; and a little later the ash-boughs, laid along the hedgerows round the skirt of the moor, began to throw out buds, and every young

[1] This is a literal fact ; the two were found in the position described.

male deer came to eat them, greedy for the delicacy. The calf saw some new sights also that spring, the grey hens in the centre of the ring, and the blackcock dancing solemnly round them to show what desirable mates they were. And at the last he felt a new sensation, a pain in his forehead, which became remarkably tender in one spot, and eventually threw out a single little knob of dark grey velvet on the near side. All the other yearlings that he saw had two, and he felt himself ill-used in having but one ; but there the matter was, and not to be helped.

He still remained with his dam through that summer, and, as she bore no calf that year, he had her still to himself ; and, by the time the winter was come, he felt strong enough to lead the hounds a long dance before they should run up to him. But the day at last came when they were parted for ever. It was a mild, grey November morning, and they were lying with half a dozen more of the herd in some dry grass tufts in the boggy ground of Brendon Common, when the hounds came up to find them, and two couple of tufters catching view raced after them as he had never known them race before. He went away in company with his dam and ran with her for two miles or more, though a man who was waiting for them tried

his best to gallop in between them ; but at last the hounds drove them so hard that they lost all thought of each other and turned away in different directions. He galloped like the wind by the way that she had showed him towards the cliffs, and, when he came to the water, ran down and up as she had taught him ; but he dared not linger long, and climbed up with all haste to the covert, startling the woodcocks out of their day-dreams, and never pausing till he reached the stunted oaks above the sea. Then he stopped, and, finding all quiet, enjoyed a drink and a splash in a little stream, and lay down determined to go straight to the sea if he were troubled again. But the hind made for Dunkery, and soon the whole pack was after her flying at the top of their speed. She found four stags together at the hill, but they drove her away, and she toiled on alone, on and on and on. Then her beautiful neck began to droop and her feet to falter, and presently she sank the hill for Horner Water, which she never left again alive. But the yearling knew nothing of all this ; he knew only that he never saw her again, and he did not care, for now he had grown a horn and could take care of himself.

Then another spring came round, and the little horn on his forehead dropped off ; it was rather

painful, but the pain was soon over ; and in its stead there grew up a slender spire with two points, brow and trey, upon it. A great to-do he made when the horn was full grown and the time came for fraying off the velvet ; he chose a young ash-tree, and went round and round it rubbing and burnishing till he fairly cut all the bark off, and left the tree to die. But it was a great disadvantage to have but one horn, for all the deer that had two made a point of bullying him whenever they met him. They turned him out and made him run for them again and again, and in October, when he thought of choosing a wife, they drove him off with ease. Next year things were just the same. He was too young to be hunted, but he was constantly obliged to run for others, until at last he grew so cunning in baffling the hounds and in hiding himself from other deer, that it was a hard matter for either to find him. When October came he did not stay long to fight with the others, but stole away a single hind from the herd as his companion, and took her away to the distant covert where he had lived as a calf. Still regularly as October came round he went back to Dunkery for the winter and joined the herd there.

And as the years passed on he grew into a great stag. He never bore more than a single horn, and

that neither very big nor very heavy, but he was none the less a fine deer and could hold his own with the young ones at any rate. He was cunning too, and could hide himself away so that no hound could find him, in odd ledges on the cliff, or in some patch of gorse so thick that no hound would face it. And he never walked into his lair, but stood at a distance and hurled himself into it with one great bound, so as to leave no scent behind him, and then lay like a stone. So for season after season he escaped all trouble from the hounds. And as time went on he discovered how to take advantage of his one horn; for one day when he was shoving head to head with all his might against another stag, he slipped aside and gave his enemy such a thrust in the flank that the other was glad to run away limping and bleeding and fairly beat. And then he threw up his head and belled loudly in triumph.

It was not until he was fully eight years old that he found the pack after him again. It was in October, the last day of the season, that they found him, and a long chase he led them. For, starting from the foot of Dunkery, he made straight for the distant home of his calfhood, fourteen miles away. The hounds did not get away very close to him, and he felt as if he could run for ever, old

as he was. So away he went over grass and heather eight miles before he dreamed of touching the water, and, rising up refreshed after a short bath, cantered on in the teeth of the westerly breeze confident as ever. As he went he caught the wind of a herd of hinds lying on the common, and ran straight into the middle of them ; and up they rose, hinds with calves in terrible alarm, wondering what was going to happen. Then the hounds came up to them and scattered in all directions after the hinds, while he went on chuckling to himself, and having reached his refuge lay in the water till he felt quite cool and fresh, and curled up for the night as comfortable as could be.

Another year passed ; October came again, and again he was in Dunkery among the herd. He went down to the fields to feed, and came back to a little brake on the hill-side, a favourite place with all deer, and known as Sweetworthy, the sweet meadow ; he walked quietly up to a patch of gorse, jumped into the middle of it and lay down to sleep. Nor was he conscious of the presence, a little after dawn, of a man who came creeping up to leeward of him and noted the slot of his great feet leading into the brake but not out of it. The hounds came to Cloutsham, straight across

the valley from him, at eleven o'clock, and a number of people to meet them, for it was the last day of the stag-hunting season. And the man who had crept round the brake went apart with the master, and said very quietly, "In Sweetworthy, my lord—a good stag. I'm so sure that I would make a bet to find him myself." And the other said, "That's well, Miles." And presently the pair of them rode across the valley with the huntsman and two couple of hounds.

The One-horned Stag heard them coming, but he only lay the closer. The hounds were laid on to the line by which he had passed five or six hours before and hunted it slowly towards him, nearer, nearer, till at last they came right up to his bed, and bayed with fierce triumph as he jumped up before them. He made three bounds through the gorse thicket and came right upon a man who yelled *Tally-ho!* in his face and blew his horn so fiercely that he waited no longer but dashed down the steep wooded combe and over Cloutsham Ball to the valley that leads to the forest. And as he reached the bottom he heard the whole pack upon his trail and knew that the worst had come. Two miles he galloped straight up the valley to its head, the hounds flying after him and a hundred horsemen in their

wake, and then he climbed gallantly up the head of the combe, topped the bank above it and pointed straight over the open moor for the distant home of his calfhood. He felt the cool wind in his face, and ran gallantly on; but the hounds were close behind him, and he could gain little on them. On and on he galloped, not daring to wait and soil in the cool brown stream, till he left the heather for the grass of the forest. Then for the first time he ran up a small thread of water, but he had been in it only a very few minutes when the hounds came over the hill, and he knew that he must fly once more. On they came to the water without faltering,—there were not a dozen horsemen with them now,—flung down to the stream and cast themselves upward. Then at last their pace slackened for a moment, but presently Telegram ran slowly up the bank, holding the line truly, though it was still weak from water, and Foreman pressed forward to hold it with him. And then they opened their mouths and spoke, and the One-horned Stag heard them, and his heart died within him.

Still he toiled gallantly on over the yellow grass of the North Forest, breasting the long ascent to southward that lay between him and

his refuge. Could he only reach the top, he would be able to hold his own yet; but struggle as he might the hounds gained on him, till just short of the top he turned back in despair, for they were hardly out of view. Wheeling on the line like a squadron of drilled horse, they raced down the slope as they had raced up it; and the old hounds came bounding to the front, for they knew that the end was at hand. Two miles they raced to the water at the bottom, and there the deer stood before them. Then they raised an exulting cry, and with one rush they swept him off his legs; and his head sank down below the water; but before they could harm him further the knife did its work, and the brown stream ran foul and reddened with his blood.

The one horn still hangs in a Devonshire home among the heads of Exmoor deer that died in the year of Waterloo; and those that see it look learnedly at the skull and discourse at length on the strange chance that left its growth imperfect. But there are a few that never forget that race over the moor, and ask if they will ever enjoy a better fifty-five minutes than the death-chase of the Old One-horned Stag.

A RUN IN A GALE

"TAKE not your hounds out on a very windy day." So wrote Mr. Peter Beckford at the end of the eighteenth century; and Mr. Jorrocks, as we know, entered the sentiment with approval in his journal. No doubt it is sound enough; and yet, there are hunting countries in which, if strictly applied, it would mean the loss of a good many days' sport; and Exmoor, rising to a height of sixteen hundred feet, and looking over the Atlantic, is one of them. There winter-hunting is rough work, and you will get more or less wet through on most days; but you have the moor to yourself, or nearly so, and only fog or frost need keep hounds at home. Forty years ago, I remember starting on a morning in late December which seemed thoroughly unpromising. A howling south-westerly gale, rather more severe than was ordinary, had been blowing all night, with sheets of rain, and was still blowing as hard as ever when the light at last broke upon an

extremely cheerless-looking world. But though it was wet, there was no mist ; and at 9 A.M. I found myself jogging along in company with the hunt-servants and sixteen couple of hounds over the five miles that separated us from the meet, which was a well-known farm on the north side of Dunkery—the highest ground on the moor. For four miles of the long ascent we were sheltered by friendly banks on each side of the road ; the wind yelled over our heads, and the rain only beat through the shoulders of our clothing on the weather side. But in time we emerged on to one of the most exposed spots on the moor, and I shall not readily forget the experience. Hardly were we fairly in the open than a squall of peculiar violence struck us full in the left flank, and my mare staggered across to the lee-side of the road. For a moment I thought that she would be blown over, but she recovered herself and went placidly on. At the meet there was no one ; and as, for the first and last time in my life, I was acting as master, we got to work at once, drew out eight of our sixteen couple, shut up the rest in the farm and started to draw one of the deep wooded combes which run down from the north side of Dunkery, comfortable places which no gale in the world could disturb.

We found directly; and I saw go away within five minutes along the same track first a hare, then a fox and lastly what we were in search of—four hinds. They ran down wind along the side of the hill, and thus mercifully we could follow them with our backs to the gale, the wind roaring above us and a score of little waters roaring down the hill-side below. Scent was good, and to run before the gale was better; but presently my mare stumbled on to her nose over a boulder hidden in the heather; the wind entered the hiatus between me and my saddle, and only by a frantic effort did I save myself from being blown off. After a mile or two, one hind turned down to the vast wooded valleys below, the whole of the eight couple followed her, and we plunged down after them out of the blast. Even there the booming of wind and water made hearing difficult; but hounds were bustling their hind along merrily, and after a wide ring she turned back towards the combe where we had found her. We galloped in all haste up towards the farmhouse, viewed her close to it and, by the time the hounds came up, had the remaining eight couple ready to join them. Then they all ran up the bottom of the combe, while we cantered along the top, with the gale abeam. It was blowing

as hard as ever, but the wind had veered a point or two and the rain had ceased, so that it was not quite so difficult to see, though quite as difficult to sit in the saddle.

Suddenly the huntsman pointed ahead and began to gallop hard; and I caught a glimpse of a graceful neck and two ears well laid back. She's away! away! pointing for the open moor in the teeth of the gale. The huntsman pulls out his horn and tries to blow, but fails. It would be perfectly useless if he succeeded, for one could not hear him a yard away; and the sixteen couple need no calling, for they come bounding out of the combe with scent breast high and race away to windward. And we bend low over our saddle-bows and race after them, hardly able to see, quite unable to hear, but hoping that she may not turn back into the deep coverts, gale or no gale. There is a nasty mile or more of wet ground to be crossed at the outset, but we are all light-weights—even I, though eight inches taller than huntsman or whip, walked then only ten stone two—and my bay mare is a wonder over the deep. The water flies behind us in sheets, but we emerge at last on to the long sound heather and race along as before. I can hardly see the huntsman, who is but a few yards

ahead and to my left, for the clouds of spray that whirl astern of him as he gallops on; and a like sheet of spray almost envelops the pack. And the gale howls and shrieks and worries at us as though it would tear us to pieces. Now hounds, which have so far been above us on our left, sink below us, and suddenly the huntsman points ahead, and with difficulty slews round his head to shout something of which the very sound is inaudible. Yes, there she is, not more than five hundred yards ahead of the pack, going at the top of her speed and keeping her distance, but unable to gain on them. For some time we can watch her until a bend in the valley hides her from view. The hounds sink lower and lower into it, we remaining at the top of the hill; and at last, after a burst of six miles, there is a respite. She has come to water—to the raging little flood that runs down the valley—and we can pull up. She must have gone downstream, for she could not possibly face the force of the torrent; and the hounds, fully aware of this, cast themselves down, some of them crossing the water so as to command both banks. We trot parallel with them for a couple of hundred yards, and presently the huntsman points again. There she is, close under the bank, with the whole of

her sunk under water except her head. Hounds have not yet reached the spot, but Clarendon and Restless are feathering not many yards above her. She has evidently left the water and followed the bank for a few steps in order to avoid some big boulder and has jumped in again. Yes! Clarendon throws up his head and speaks. We cannot hear him, but she does, and sinks herself to her very chin. They cast on downward and pass her by, though she is within a yard of some of them; and no amount of horn-blowing nor holloaing can recall them. How should it, for we can hardly hear our own noises in the turmoil of wind and water? But after trying down for another hundred yards, hounds return of their own accord to try back. Some of them overshoot her even then, but Guardsman, though it is but his first season, becomes busy on the bank just above her; and presently up goes his head exultantly and he plunges in. Instantly she is up and off on the opposite bank to us, amid a chorus of which we can hear nothing; Guardsman is swept down for a hundred yards before he can land; and, once again, we are away.

My mare, without waiting for any hint from me, gallops straight down the steep combe as hard as she can go, splashes through the water

and climbs the steep ascent as though she were just out of the stable. I trust that she knows what is before her, for I do—some two miles of steady incline over heavy ground before we reach a good surface again. Gallantly she breasts it, still hampered by the wind which, though no longer dead ahead, is still "before the beam." But hounds gain steadily on us, and I keep an anxious eye ahead for a neck or two ears on the sky-line, for this is a brave hind, and, if she reaches the top of this slope, she may go on for three miles beyond it. Painfully we toil up and on, the mare sinking fetlock-deep at every stride, while the wind shrieks mockery through the long yellow grass. Hounds are nearing the summit now, and the mare is sobbing, though she still gallops on. Oh, to get off this accursed ground! But see, hounds are turning! Our hind cannot trust herself to reach the top and is winding back. How they stride over the yellow grass, the best scenting and worst riding ground in the world! We can turn our backs on the gale and cut across to them. There she is, making her last desperate burst to the water in the next combe. They are in view, and we see thirty-two throats vainly raise their cry of triumph against the wind. She reaches the flooded stream and, as she staggers

into it, Craftsman makes a bound at her off armpit and knocks her over. The brown peat water flies up, her head sinks down, and the motionless body turns over and over in its course downstream, while the hounds are swept helplessly scores of yards below it. I can see the huntsman blowing and holloaing a few yards from me; I can see every hound of the sixteen couple baying madly; but I can hear nothing save the roar of wind and water. It is, and has been for some eight or ten miles since we went away over the open, a dumb crambo of a chase; and the last scene seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, in the nature of a dream.

Such chases occur every winter on Exmoor, and will continue to occur in the future; from which I infer that there, at any rate, you may take out your hounds on a very windy day, though you must take your chance (for instances are not unknown) of being blown out of your saddle.

A DAY ON THE YELLOW CLAY

YELLOW clay — the name is not attractive, the substance is not beautiful, the associations are neither of health nor enjoyment. Barren shrubs, sickly reeds, rank disorderly herbage are the natural characteristics of yellow clay all the world over; while to unfortunate humanity it is connected chiefly with garments caked from heel to waist, with slovenliness and with rheumatism. Test it, if you will, in the so-called paradise of New Zealand, on the cold comfortless hills round Wellington, where men have felled the forest that once hid their nakedness, and you will find the blackened corpses of the trees shrouded in wiry unprofitable bracken, and English gorse struggling with noxious native weeds for a hold on the miserable soil. Or go no farther than English Devon, a county generally remembered by tracts of rich red loam and cliffs of stern grey ironstone, and there you will see, stretching from the Cornish border full thirty miles eastward, a large patch of

as wretched and inhospitable country as ever raised a thistle. Clovelly, with all its beauties of cliff and wood and wave, is within a few hundred yards ; but visitors seldom turn their eyes from the sea to mark what manner of land it is that thus abruptly ends in a precipice of ironstone above the Bristol Channel. And they are right, for it is condemned to hopeless infertility, and all green things are crushed between the hammer of the west wind and the anvil of the yellow clay.

And yet there is something to be loved in the yellow clay. I speak not as an agriculturist, for though I have been assured by many a farmer that it is capital land for summering bullocks in dry seasons, I cannot forget that dry seasons are not the rule in North Devon, and that the little red cattle of the country possess to a singular degree the virtue of growing fat upon poor fodder. Moreover, I have a not wholly grateful feeling towards certain men of a past generation who sank thousands of pounds in the endeavour to improve some of this detestable land and make two blades of grass grow where one declined to grow before : a philanthropic effort which resulted only in the temporary discomfort of innocent snipe, and the lasting impoverishment of a deserving posterity. But I love this yellow clay for its steady refusal to

be improved. Most people have in their hearts a secret admiration for any creature that declines to be tamed, whether it be horse or dog or man. It is true that the fate of such is generally to be shot or hanged or otherwise cleared out of the way; but no such summary measures can be taken with land. You may gash it with drains and gutters, but if it be irreclaimable yellow clay you will hardly leave so much as a scar upon it; and your efforts will be as fruitless and, if you would but confess it, only less ridiculous than those of Xerxes to chastise the Hellespont. Wild animals that shrink from the discipline of man know the yellow clay for their friend and flock to it, just as men who shun order and obedience take refuge in savage lands. Wherefore, to him that loves a really wild day's sport, the bleak, inhospitable, forsaken land is a paradise indeed.

Of all months in the year, November is, on the whole, the best for a walk with the gun over the yellow clay, with a soft wind blowing from the south-west and a damp leaden sky overhead; a day when Lundy rises grey and cold out of a cold grey sea, and the herring-boats fly home with their red sails turned to grey, and the smoke of the coasting colliers throws aloft an almost welcome cloud of inky black as a plaything for the

mild warm breeze. The great rolling range of Exmoor, twenty miles away, is half shrouded in mist ; but, unless I am mistaken, the staghounds are even now jogging gently over the heather to the meet, and the old huntsman is remarking, as his horse sinks hoof-deep in the spongy soil, that " the water will fly on the forest " when hounds begin to run. But they must run without me to-day, for I have put on my very worst clothes for a long and dirty walk, and am filling my cartridge-bag. Shall it be twenty or thirty cartridges to-day ? Twenty will be ample in all probability, but let us make it thirty, for the weight even so is trifling. And now let us begin the day, as always in North Devon, by climbing a hill. A steep narrow road, with banks four feet above my head and a bottom that the Local Board strives in vain to alter from a kind of river's bed to a macadamised highway, leads me whither we are bound ; and after a mile of travelling in the close muggy atmosphere I feel as though I were marching through tropical forest.

Here is the top at last : the wind strikes gratefully cool in my face ; and there, leaning over a gate, is a keeper, black and swarthy as a Spaniard, with a single spaniel. He too has donned his very worst clothes, and, did I not know him to be

the gentlest of living creatures, might pass for a dangerous companion. There are not many snipe in, he thinks, though there were plenty a month agone, and he has not seen many woodcock; there may be a pheasant or two, and there is a brood or two of partridges, though terrible wild; hares are almost extinct and rabbits very scarce; but we can't tell what we shall find till we try, and we had best walk through the beech-spinney first, if I will please to take the left-hand side while he goes through the middle. The spinney aforesaid is but of two acres, a collection of miserable stunted trees which fight with infinite bravery a losing battle against the eternal wind from across the Atlantic. I scramble over a gap in the bank, smearing myself all over with greasy yellow clay in the process, and, knowing the wild ways of the Devonshire spaniel, hasten forward alongside the spinney. The beeches sigh mournfully as though expecting a gale, and I only faintly catch the sound of wings in the trees behind me. I whisk round; nothing is to be seen; then again round, and there, a good forty yards ahead of me, are a long bill and two great lazy wings flapping leisurely off with all the assurance of an owl. I fire the first barrel at him instantly, and, unless the smoke has deceived me, he falls leisurely to

the ground ; but even while the report is ringing in my ear I hear the keeper yelling something unintelligible behind me, and again face rapidly to the rear. There are the lazy wings again, but this time they are full seventy yards away, and as the second barrel is snapped after them they simply rise a few feet in the air and flap away erratically, as if they might pause at any moment, on and on and on till they are fairly lost to sight. The keeper clambers out of the spinney, stands on the bank and takes off his cap in despair. " There was two got up at my feet and went back," he says ; " beautiful shots. I depended that you would have got the both." I endeavour to excuse myself as best I may, and point out that I have killed one that went forward ; but he will not be comforted. He had made sure that both would come to me, and if they did not the fault is obviously mine ; but he adds with a shake of the head, " They'm false, they 'oodcocks ; false as rats they be." And I, who know the similes of Devon and are aware that this comparison is the highest tribute that can be paid to the cunning of any wild animal, feel rather less guilty than I did.

And now we pass fairly on to the yellow clay moors, thousands of acres of rolling ground, the

yellow grass dotted with clumps of gorse and cut up by ragged neglected fences, sour and ugly and soaking with water. The spaniel, which so far has been kept rigidly to heel, seizes the opportunity to break away to the nearest gorse-clump and, in spite of frantic rebukes, declines to return. "Chloe—a, you wild old hermit," yells the keeper, for spaniels in Devon, for some reason, are frequently christened with classical names, and a hermit (I have struggled in vain to imagine why) is the measure of wildness.

"Why do you bring out a wild young dog?" I ask with asperity.

"Oh, she's nine or ten year old," he answers with a sweet smile; "and she isn't wild most times, but she's terrible hard of hearing. She'll be back in a minute, but I expect we'm best get on after her."

I think so too, and presently come upon her supremely busy on what is evidently a very faint line of scent.

"Looketh like a pheasant," says the keeper softly; "please to keep on after her, sir."

She puzzles it out, inch by inch, very slowly, and takes us on for three hundred yards to a gateway, which, as usual on these moors, is filled with a sea of deep mud and twelve inches of water.

Here scent naturally fails, and the keeper, who has come to the conclusion that we are on the stale trail of that rare animal, a hare, is for calling the dog off; but my curiosity is aroused and I insist on casting forward, to see whether nothing can be learned from the impressionable clay. Not a sign is to be found on this side; but on splashing through the water we find on the far side new tracks in the softest of the clay, and, where it grows drier, the unmistakable imprint of three long claws—nay, in one favourable spot I think I can detect the mark of a spur.

The spaniel is called forward and laid on, but scent is weak from water and she cannot own it; so we cast forward as gravely as though a fox were before us, and after some trouble hit the line once more. After a couple of hundred yards scent improves, and the spaniel's pace with it; and presently I drop my gun to the trail and am fain to run. The dog runs on to a patch of gorse where she throws up for a moment, but after a few minutes of desperate excitement makes a sudden dash into a tuft of fern; and up rises a great cock-pheasant with all the astounding clamour that once so alarmed Mr. Briggs. I have had such good sport with him already, hunting his drag up to his bed, that, but for the keeper, I

should be inclined to spare him ; but old cock-pheasants are mischievous as vermin, and his fate is sealed. The spaniel picks him up and retrieves him with every sign of satisfaction, and I make a mental note of our run. Time, about fifteen minutes ; distance, not less than half a mile ; and a kill in the open.

So far, good. I am already wet through and splashed from head to foot, so I make the more readily for a patch of bog that is a favourite with snipe. The ground quakes beneath us as though we were on bubbles, and we step warily, for if we break through the thin crust of moss on which we walk, we cannot tell whether we shall sink to our knees, to mid-thigh or to our armpits. Every instant I expect to hear the rush of wings and the shrill bleat of the little white-breasted bird ; but it comes not, and I have almost given up hope when, with a louder whir, an unexpected covey of partridges rises, a long shot ahead of me, and skims away with the speed of the wind. A lucky snap-shot from my first barrel brings down the hindmost bird of them, and immediately a wisp of a dozen snipe rises three gun-shots before me, startled by the report, and vanishes out of our sight. It is exasperating, but it cannot be helped : on the moors one must kill what one can

whenever one can; and the man who will not fire from dread of spoiling his own sport had far better stay at home.

We watch the last of the snipe fade away against the grey clouds, when we are interrupted by a shrill voice shouting something unintelligible five hundred yards away. The keeper vociferates an equally unintelligible reply, and remarks that 'tis Mr. Buzzacott a-speaking, and that he made out the word partridges. Presently Mr. Buzzacott appears in person, as shabbily dressed as the poorest of his labourers, although he rents three hundred acres of yellow clay and better land; but he is received with great deference by the keeper, for he is the most eloquent preacher in the nearest chapel, and the keeper's wife is one of the pillars of his congregation. I have never sat under him myself, but I know his discourses on hell-fire by village repute as some of the most moving that ever were delivered on that favourite topic of dissenting orators; and being the descendant of French Huguenot refugees, originally called Boucicault, he has perhaps a better title to fervour than most of his neighbours. He hurries up breathless and grasps my hand with great warmth. "They partridges," he says in the richest of shrill Devon, "be gone up to my little root-field, so if

you will fetch a compass and come in to the far side of them, the birds will undoubtedly go to the little old withy-bed, where I've seen them scores of times. I think, moreover, that you will find another covey there. I have long been in doubt whether there was one brood on my farm or two broods, but what I have seen in the last two weeks satisfactorily convinceth me that there's two." Every syllable comes out crisp and sharp as the shot from a machine-gun, so excellent is the practice of the pulpit ; and we start at once to fetch the necessary compass round the root-field, walking too fast to waste another word.

" Now," says Mr. Buzzacott, as he throws down a harrow, kicks away half a cart-load of gorse, and tenderly lifts up the bars of a rickety gate which are held together by two straw bandages, as many hazel binders and several pieces of string, " here the birds be. There they go—da—" he adds, the warnings of the chapel forgotten for a moment in his excitement, but remembered in time to omit the final consonants and so save his conscience. " They'm gone right," he continues, intently watching the flight of the birds. " Now, sir, follow down my old fence, and you'm sure to find them, if you'll excuse me from attending on you further, for I

am afflicted with the rheumatics." So off we start again to try down the fence for half a mile towards our lost covey. But the fence must be crossed, and that is no easy matter. First comes a deep ditch overgrown with gorse and thorns; then a bank broad enough to drive a coach on, also heavily overgrown with thorns, and so hollowed in the middle as almost to be cut in two; then another deep ditch of like manner with the first, and some remarkably soft ground just beyond it. The folks that built such fences must either have been jealous of their boundaries or else keen sportsmen, for one never knows what game they may hold. I scramble through it somehow, with much splashing and scratching, while the spaniel selects the hollow in the midst and becomes busy at once.

A rabbit dodging in and out alongside the ditch is the first victim, and a stray woodcock the second; and then the spaniel begins to run with a keenness that shows that but one animal can be before her. There is nothing for it but to run as near as I may alongside of her, and hope that I may not be beaten by the most cunning of birds; but running in the deep slippery soil is no such easy matter, and a cross fence brings me up short. I am barely at the top, panting and

breathless, when I hear the heavy flutter of a rising cock-pheasant, which skims away low on the other side of the fence, giving me no chance but a long snap-shot, which is duly fired without result. But the report flushes a wisp of half-a-dozen snipe, of which I have just time to pick off one ; and then the bank beneath my feet slides away in a small avalanche of greasy clay ; I hang for a moment on my heels, pass swiftly on to the broad of my back and then shoot down gracefully into the ditch below me. I am splashed up to the eyes and caked with clay from neck to heel ; the ditch is up to my waist, a protruding root has lifted my jacket over my head and my face and hands are buried for a moment in a gorse-bush ; but the voice of the keeper, unable from the other side of the boundary fence to witness the catastrophe, still urges me forward, I know not wherefore, and I scramble out and on, loading and repairing damages as I go.

Out comes a rabbit, breaking boldly across the field, not too near, but a cross-shot, and therefore an easy one. He rolls over handsomely, and then, as usual, when one least expects it, up rises a covey of partridges, wild as hawks, but just within range. One bird falls to a very lucky shot, six more fly away and I pause for the moment quite exhausted.

The keeper, bewildered by the shooting of which he can see nothing, crushes his way to me through the boundary fence, and rejoices to find that there is something to be picked up, more indeed than we had expected, for the spaniel produces not one dead partridge, but two, though how the second can have come by his death, unless by the shot that killed the rabbit, before the covey rose from the ground, is a mystery. However, we are now satisfied that we have found both coveys, and that there are thirteen partridges for certain somewhere in the bleak acres around us, if we can only find them; not a great stock according to the ideas of some gentlemen of the gun, but to us on the yellow clay a multitude without number. Also, we have certain knowledge of one pheasant, and we may have the good luck to run against some more snipe.

So we tear on joyfully to the withy-bed, which is indeed no withy-bed, but a small sheet of shallow water, choked with high sickly weeds and surrounded with quaking moss. It is not a place in which one would naturally look for partridges; but all wild animals, from the red deer downwards, seem to have a passion for lying in a dry spot amid wet ground, so we approach it with all silence and caution. No bird

rises, and the spaniel, now quite disciplined by hard exercise, is sent in to see what she can find. Still there is no sign of a bird. She splashes through the water to the ruined bank that dams it ; and, after much rummaging, makes a dash into a tuft of grass, and away skims a partridge at his best pace. He drops dead, but is hardly fallen when another rises, likewise to share his fate, and five more are flushed and away before I can reload. We are lucky to have found them, for when the Devonshire partridge takes it into his head to hide and lie fast, it is difficult to make him show himself. How often have I walked for hours, even in early September, over farms where I knew birds to be plentiful, and failed to find a single one. If they wish to conceal themselves, there is always a great bank within a hundred yards of them where any number of coveys could find shelter, and you may tread on them before they will rise. I remember once to have driven a covey of fourteen into a scrap of copse not forty yards square. Two men and two dogs went through it with busy sticks and hideous noises, and, finding nothing, joined us in abuse of the man who said that he had marked them down. He, like a sensible fellow, said nothing, but simply stayed by the copse for half an hour after we had left it, and

presently saw the whole fourteen run out as if nothing had happened, to seek new lodging in an adjoining bank.

By this time I am beginning to look forward to an extraordinary day's sport, and wishing that I had brought more cartridges. A couple more snipe and a couple more rabbits heighten my hopes, and I talk big about killing more game than we care to carry. After such luck I should not altogether be surprised to come upon black game, though in truth I have never seen a poult, as they call him in Devon, anywhere within twenty miles of the place where we stand. But we can never tell what we may flush next in this country; a bittern, a wild goose or even a pelican would be no great surprise, and would be more welcome to me, to be seen and saluted, than a hundred pheasants to be shot at and killed. But it is not safe to count on the yellow clay for a day of continuous sport, and, though we try every likely spot, for the next two hours not a cartridge is fired. Magpies, hawks, crows and a dozen of the keeper's pet abominations greet us at a respectful distance, and as we draw for a time nearer to the cliffs we have leisure to admire the red bill of the Cornish chough and the graceful wheeling flight of two pair of great blunt-winged buzzards. But

game we see none, though we tramp on with exemplary diligence ; and our scattered coveys seem to have vanished into the air.

At last we resolve to forsake the open and draw a long strip of ragged gorse-brake adjoining our boundary ; and lest we should give to our neighbour what we want for ourselves, we draw it down wind. I steal down to the leeward end, take my stand in the middle of a tiny stream, which I select as, on the whole, the driest and firmest spot to be found in an extremely treacherous patch of ground, and wait for what may come. A wood-pigeon, evidently scared by the keeper, comes first, sailing down over the hedge under which I stand concealed, a fine rocketing shot. Have I held far enough before him ? Yes, the swift wings close, the ringed neck sinks and he falls far beyond us in a cloud of white down. I hear the spaniel speaking faintly on the lower side of the brake, and watch sharply for a rabbit. A water-ousel comes flitting down over our head in panic terror, and a water-rail, which for a moment I mistake for a jack-snipe, follows him. Three jays, which have been screeching irresolute for some minutes, at last make up their minds to face the open and be off ; but still the spaniel speaks three hundred yards above us sharply and savagely, I know not

upon what scent. Then there is a slight rustle in the hedge, a lithe brown body appears for an instant and, just giving a glimpse of a yellow belly, vanishes instantly into a rabbit-hole. Where there are stoats it is not likely that there are rabbits, and I cease to watch for them accordingly. The spaniel has fallen silent, the blackbirds now begin to stream out past us with terrified screams, and I therefore conclude that, though I can hear nothing of them, keeper and dog have nearly beaten the brake out to me. Another rustle in the hedge and out comes very leisurely and slowly within ten yards of me a great grey fox. Quite unconscious of my presence he stands for a moment listening, and I can study him at my leisure—a great grey fellow, as I have said, evidently old and well stricken in years, with a bit of a ruff round his neck that gives him almost the appearance of a wolf. His teeth are past their first sharpness, as I guess ; but I suspect that he would lead even the best pack of hounds a merry dance, and make a brave fight at the end. I remember to have seen just such another on Exmoor, draggled, bent and beat, hurl himself into a tuft of gorse and turn defiant as a stag to meet his doom. The pack had begun to tail after a long chase ; a single hound first came up to him

and, after one glance into the gorse bush, decided that it would be more prudent to wait for assistance before going any farther.

There he stands, the hoary-brushed old vagabond, his mind little perturbed, but inclined to think that on the whole he had better move. They are not his sworn enemies that have intruded upon him, he is sure of that. But hark! the keeper opens his mouth to cheer the spaniel, and the grey ears listen intently. No! it is not the sound that he dreads; certainly it is not, but it is disagreeably near of kin to it, and it is best to beat a dignified retreat. A muffled note from the spaniel confirms his resolution, and he trots slowly away at his ease. It is perhaps a shame to shake such a confiding nature, but old foxes must not be suffered to relapse into imprudent repose. I used to be able to halloo once upon a time, and here is an excuse for recovering the lost art. The grey brush gives a whisk, the stealthy trot becomes a gallant stride, and the old sinner vanishes in haste away to the cliffs, or he best knows whither. The keeper hurries out to the sound; he has been busy with the study of a heap of feathers, and the spaniel, not caring to face the gorse, has been whiling away the time with a dance round an imaginary rabbit.

But this interlude has broken the spell. As we strike away back to our ground of the morning, I get a shot into a flock of golden plover and add one of them to the bag. A ragged fence unexpectedly produces another woodcock, and the adjoining moor a jack-snipe; then, just as we are wondering whither we shall go next, we hear a familiar shrill voice, and Mr. Buzzacott, riding a bare-backed cart mare with a halter, comes splashing through the clay to tell us that he has flushed one brood of partridges on his *arish* (stubble) and marked them down. Poor unfortunate birds! but we make haste after them, and are presently blundering, not quite so fresh as in the morning, over tussocks of furze and sickly rushes in pursuit. They are wild, but I manage to drop one, and the indefatigable Buzzacott, galloping heavily on the cart mare, marks them down again. Once more we hurry after them, for the light is beginning to fail. They are scattered and rise singly; two are easily bagged; and then an ominous cloud from the sea breaks into sharp cutting rain. The moisture is a small matter, for I have long been wet through to the waist, but the growing darkness is more serious. The third bird rises and is missed with both barrels; the fourth has the same luck, and the

fifth I lose sight of altogether. It is of no use; I never could see well in the dusk, and having but two cartridges left I decide to try no more. Mr. Buzzacott smiles with kindly contempt, and suggests that I should jump on to the back of his mare and go on; nor for all my argument will he believe that I stop not because we are unwilling to walk, but because I am unable to see.

Well, then, if I must go home, he will show us the shortest way. I know what that means; but indeed a little food with rest and shelter is not unwelcome after our walk, and it is not unwillingly that I follow Mr. Buzzacott into his house. A pale girl, looking ghastly in the flickering light of the fire, rises as I enter, and the hacking cough, which even so much exertion entails, tells too plainly what is amiss. She answers in reply to my inquiries that she is better, but Mr. Buzzacott will not hear of it. "Oh! her's waker," he says, cheerfully and encouragingly, "waker every day, I can see that." The girl, I am glad to say, is well and hearty at this moment, but it is not from want of preparation for death on her father's part. In truth all of Mr. Buzzacott's class and below it, in Devon at any rate, and I believe elsewhere, seem to experience a positive delight in feeling the presence

of death. Even in their letters, whenever inspiration fails, the monotonous phrase, " Dear father and mother, may we meet in heaven," recurs again and again. But all such reflections are cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Buzzacott, who, with many apologies, leads me into the parlour, and there, after a few minutes' solitude, which I eagerly devote to an old hawker's print of Commerce restoring Prosperity to France and England, *Anno* 1803 (three imposing females measuring four feet from forehead to waist, five more from waist to knee, and three more from knee to heel), I am set face to face with tea enough for a dozen hungry men.

With difficulty I take my leave before I have seriously overeaten myself, and walk off with the keeper through the driving rain. He has been well cared for too, and is talkative. Gradually he reveals to me unasked that, in spite of Mr. Buzzacott's influence, who is of course a Radical, he himself is a reactionary Tory. Three miles are traversed quickly in listening to these outpourings, and it is only when I reach my door that it occurs to me to count our bag. One cock-pheasant, a venerable bird with spurs an inch long, I left with Mr. Buzzacott, who, I hope for his own sake, will stew it for many hours. Besides

that I have four brace of partridges, three woodcock, four snipe, four rabbits, a plover, and a pigeon ; and I do not ask for a better day over any country than I have enjoyed over the yellow clay.

A GREAT DAY ON A LITTLE STREAM

In a remote corner of the west country lies a certain secluded valley which some eight centuries ago represented, and until Henry VIII.'s day continued to represent, one of the remotest outposts of civilisation. Pious men, when Henry II. was king, founded here a monastery, itself a renewal of a still earlier foundation, that so, at the very end of the world, the serious might meditate upon a world to come and prepare themselves for it. The building itself, which stretched right across the modest breadth of the valley, has vanished ; and though a modern house has been erected upon its foundations, the place seems still to retain its monastic character. On the hill above stands the abbey church with a graceful tower, defying the four winds of heaven. Within and without the church dates itself at once to the observing eye as of the late fifteenth century, though there are traces and relics which carry the original structure back to the twelfth.

The steep path which leads from the abbey to this church is still known as the Priests' Way. Portions of the western side of the valley are terraced and though now covered with oak-coppice, are still known as the Vineyard. There the monks grew the grapes for the sacramental wine. These can rarely have ripened in such a climate. For within a mile of the abbey the valley ends in the Atlantic Ocean, and from the summit of the church tower you look across to Labrador. The westerly gales blow continually, driving before them clouds which dissolve into rain upon striking the high land, and shroud the valley in mist and water. The coast is wild, rocky and savage, a terror to mariners, and strewn with wrecks, ancient and modern, visible and invisible. Even on the calmest day you can hear the undertow snarling hungrily as it rasps its retreating way through the shingle; and, when a full gale is blowing, you will hardly make your way down the cliff-path to the beach, except on all fours. The tops of the oaks in the valley are bent and distorted like the limbs of a soul writhing in torment through the eternal strife with the west wind; and the very summits are shaved off, as if with a knife, by the keen blast and the still keener salt. For, when the Atlantic really rages,

the suds of spray fly about the abbey like flakes of snow, and even the highest stage of the church tower is caked inches deep with salt. Few places are better fitted to enable pious men to see the wonders of the Lord and His marvels in the deep.

Having such mundane things as food and drink to think of, however, the monks were careful to build their retreat alongside a little stream, and to lead a thread of its waters into a fish-pond, of which the traces are still visible. This pond, no doubt, they stocked with coarse fish, thereby admitting pike and perch and dace, and the like base creatures, to encroach upon the domain of the native trout. But this deadly sin may be forgiven them, for the first flood no doubt washed all undesirable aliens, that had wandered into the stream, out to sea. This stream is no mighty river ; its full course, including all affluents, not exceeding three miles, and its full breadth, where the said affluents unite, half a mile above the abbey, not exceeding on an average six feet. Such water, rapid and shallow, cannot hold big trout ; but one who loved the stream built up a succession of small dams, some of masonry, some of no more than a tree-trunk, whereby little pools are formed in which fish may grow to the weight of half a

pound, and even on rare occasions to one pound and over.

Some thirty years ago I strolled out after breakfast on a bright April morning, without so much as a hat on my head, caught up my rod mechanically and sauntered down to the water at the lowest of the dams adjacent to the house. The water was not too high, the sun was very bright and the outlook far from promising; but a fish rose in a shallow basin below the dam and, being well below him, I thought it worth while to put a march-brown over his nose. To my great surprise, in spite of the brightness of the water, he took it at once, and after a lively fight was towed into shoal water (for I had no net) and landed. Thus encouraged, I crept up a few yards to the next dam and flicked the march-brown in at the most likely spot close under the trunk that made the dam. Up came the biggest fish in the pool at once, and was landed likewise. He, like his predecessor, weighed half a pound. Obviously the next dam was also worth trying, and so I worked my way up from dam to dam for a couple of hundred yards. Some of them were awkward places owing to overhanging trees, but the trout seemed not to mind how the fly was offered to them, so long as they caught sight

of it. Thus, after putting the march-brown over the best place in nine successive dams, I found myself with one fish weighing three-quarters of a pound, eight half-pounders, and two, pulled out of rocky basins in passing, of four ounces apiece.

After such a beginning it was of course imperative to start fishing seriously, so I sallied out again, fully equipped, and made my way down the valley in all haste to the sea. These little streams invariably end in a fall, of anything from ten to forty feet, over the edge of a cliff, and then filter away unseen through the shingle to the sea. In this case the fall is not above ten feet, and below it is a little rocky gorge, through which the water bustles its way to a still pool dammed up by the shingle. When once fish have passed down these falls they are imprisoned for life. A big flood may now and again sweep away the barrier of shingle and allow escape to the sea for a few hours ; but the next gale will shut the door very speedily.

There is a fresh breeze from the west rippling the surface of the still water, and I begin by offering my flies (for I have added a blue upright to the march-brown) to anything that may chance to be there. Three little trout are taken out here, each as silver as a salmon, the water being

brackish from spray and from the salt on the shingle. In the running water, twenty yards up, every trout is of the normal brown. So I work my way up, not without difficulty, for the bank is, in some places, sheer rock with only a few precarious niches of foothold, and, in others, an equally sheer slope of thin soil, covered with dense brushwood which is shorn low by wind and salt. However, fish are rising well, and one must take one's chance of a sudden header into the water. A little way above the fall the bed of the river is a mere trough of rock, and the stream leaps headlong from basin to basin ; and here I must scramble down as best I can to the level of the water, and jerk my flies in somehow without catching them in the overhanging branches. My descent ends abruptly in a sudden crash, and I find myself lying at the foot, with my left shoulder and arm under water. But no harm is done ; and the trout are rising. Since I threw my first cast into the brackish water I have pulled out nearly a dozen four-ounce and six-ounce fish. It has not, it is true, always been easy to land them, and more than one descent for the purpose has been unpleasantly rapid ; but what of that ? The fish are rising. Now the ascent of the water is barred by a miniature

precipice, and I am fain by desperate exertion to regain the top. Some fifteen feet below me is a lovely little rocky pool, from which the stream pours down in a regular cascade. I mark the swirl of my choice, and bending low cast the march-brown into it with a long line. I see the fly rushing round a tiny bay of rock, and then down it goes. He has it, and he is a heavy fish. If he goes down that cascade he is lost—and so am I! I spring to my feet and run back, reeling up with feverish speed. For an awful moment he hangs on the lip of the pool, and then yields and dashes up to its head. He fights gallantly, as do all these little trout, and tries more than once to bolt into the cascade; but presently he gives in, dead beat. And now, how the devil am I to land him? Mercifully, there is a little landslide of soft earth descending from the bank to the water, and on this I sit down, digging my heels in and trusting to luck. Fortune favours me; I reach the bottom, not very gracefully and a little begrimed, it is true, and I put the net under a trout of three-quarters of a pound. The re-ascent of the landslide is a strenuous matter and calls for a pipe when accomplished; but now all is plain sailing. I have to do with a normal stream, between normal banks, and I work my

way up from pool to pool, taking, as I verily believe, the heaviest fish out of every one of them. Finally, I return very hungry in time for tea, and count my bag—just four dozen fish, ten of them of half a pound and over, the remainder of from four to six ounces apiece. I have caught heavier fish. In New Zealand I once had the luck, in the 'eighties, to catch twenty-four fish weighing twenty-five pounds; but many men had done far better than I, as they deserved, being far better fishermen. To great artists with the rod, such as Lord Grey of Fallodon, who can outwit the shyest fish in the Itchen or the Kennet, such plying of a tiny North Devon stream with a wet fly would be child's play. Yet even the inferior performers have their lucky days; and assuredly it was wonderful luck to catch ten half-pounders, to say nothing of three dozen smaller fish on a single day in a trickle of water little broader than a billiard table. Never have I had, nor shall I ever have again, such a day's sport as in that little stream that flows by the abbey.

THE NORTH DEVON YEOMANRY

I BECAME an officer of the North Devon Yeomanry when I was still a boy at Harrow in the year 1876. Public schools for some reason do not, or at any rate did not, attract the best class of medical man; and I remember well how the doctor, to whom I applied for a certificate of physical fitness, eyed me up and down as though I had been a public enemy. "Why," he said, after a pause, "you're all right, aren't you?" "Yes, of course," I answered; and therewith the certificate was hastily signed and I was as hastily dismissed. It has since occurred to me that the poor man was hungry for his luncheon, and that my innocent importunity had delayed him.

The regiment was one of the very many formed during the alarm of invasion in 1794; but the true secret of the Yeomanry's origin I believe to have been the anxiety of the yeoman and the tenant-farmer to escape the Militia ballot, and to avoid standing in the same rank with their own

labourers. The gentry willingly fell in with their ideas. The great landowners undertook to raise regiments, the squires around them to raise troops ; and the lesser gentry and the squires' sons became subalterns. The Yeomanry for this reason from the very first looked down upon the militiamen, and I noticed a very curious example of the continuance of the feeling not more than thirty years ago. My brother, upon taking command of the regiment, did away with the old cloth stable-jacket, which had been worn for years by all ranks, and instituted for it the more reasonable and sensible serge Norfolk-jacket. To his amazement, one of his best men sent in his kit—that is to say, took leave of the regiment—on the spot. He could not, he said, wear serge like a militiaman. My brother, somewhat puzzled, asked me if I could account for this, which, after reflection, I did by quoting two lines from an old Devonshire song which must have been written, more or less in derision, during the Napoleonic wars. The lines describe the militiaman's clothing :

> The cap o' un was leathern, his coat red and large,
> And his trousers was made of the coarsest of zarge.

There lay the secret of the whole trouble—serge for the Militia ; cloth, a superior material, for

the Yeomanry. No gentleman should have confounded the twain.

However, I went out to my first training at Barnstaple in the year 1878, and found among my brother officers some who could count forty years' service, such as it was, and were old enough to be my grandfathers. Their stories of the annual training of their early days were many and interesting. The day's work began with a perambulation of the billets by certain old yeomen, who held the rank of troop-sergeant-major, which solemn function they executed in an easy undress of unbuttoned stable-jacket, overalls and carpet slippers. One of these venerable veterans was actually serving, though not fulfilling the same duties, in my own time, and he was proud of his forty-five years' standing in the Yeomanry. By the gentle urging of these sergeant-majors the men and their horses were got on parade, after which they proceeded to march to their drill-ground, the deer-park of a neighbouring squire, three miles distant. As they passed through the town the small boys kept up, and I dare say still keep up, a continuous chant, as unvaried as that of the Frogs of Aristophanes, of "Draa swoords." Arrived at their destination, the command was given, "Prepare to dismount"—a movement

which involved reining back and considerable confusion—" Dismount "—" Milk your mares." And this homely but necessary duty having been performed, the regiment remounted and proceeded to the execution of the prescribed field-movements.

These in their turn were performed with considerable deliberation, for, though the commanding officer was a Peninsular and Waterloo veteran of the Sixteenth Light Dragoons, he had no permanent staff of regular non-commissioned officers to help him, and knew better than to try to hustle rustic Devon. Each officer had been furnished beforehand with a card, upon which had been printed the various items of the day's work, together with the words to be given in each case by the leaders of squadrons and troops. But, as even this precaution was deemed insufficient, the colonel before each evolution sounded the officers' call, expounded the nature of the coming manœuvre, instructed the leaders anew in their words of command and dismissed them to their several places. He then lifted up his voice, and uttered the words " Walk," " March," which were received for a minute or two with complete indifference and then suddenly and spasmodically obeyed. The regiment shuffled in a leisurely fashion through the movement amid a babel of

tongues and of contradictory orders, and advanced for a short distance in the new formation before it was halted. Then the officers' call was again sounded ; the officers galloped up to the colonel and saluted him ; the last manœuvre was mildly criticised ; the next was carefully rehearsed, and the leaders galloped back to their squadrons and troops for the next performance.

Five such field-days, interrupted by Sunday and church-parade—this latter a great occasion when wives and sweethearts assembled in force—brought the training to a close ; and on the sixth day the inspecting officer came down and told the yeomen that they were the finest fellows that ever were seen. On the eighth day (for the first had been wholly occupied by the business of assembling) the men were paid, the troop-horses were put into the shafts of the market-carts, and the regiment dispersed, in full satisfaction that the inspecting officer had spoken in all sincerity, and that he was a gentleman who thoroughly knew his business.

When I joined, the regiment still contained many of the old stamp of yeoman ; and a very curious appearance he presented on parade. His figure, as a rule, was a great deal too full for a stable-jacket, and miserably adapted to a hussar's

tunic ; his overalls strained themselves in vain to meet his half-boots ; and these boots, being his own property, were not always of the best. He wore a great deal of hair on his face and as much as possible on his head ; and, by an extraordinary fatality, his busby could never be induced to sit straight upon that head. His sword-belt, of white patent leather, always hung four or five inches lower than his stable-jacket and, as his horse generally stood under fifteen hands, his sword dangled dangerously close to the ground. Moreover, when the weapon was drawn, the empty scabbard danced merrily under the horse's belly in a way that drove a ticklish animal mad. It was useless to suggest that the belt should be tightened, for men of a certain girth object to such restraint ; and, if a shoulder-sling were provided, it was generally let out to such length that the sword hung as before. Moreover, the yeomen of that day were men of mature age and some station, churchwardens and guardians of the poor, and needed very delicate handling.

Besides the sword the men carried a carbine, attached to the saddle by a complicated arrangement of straps, which made it a very awkward matter to mount, and wore out the thigh of the overall when the men were in the saddle. I have

since identified this particular kind of attachment with that which was in use, more or less, in the eighteenth century. The carbine itself was known as of the Westley-Richards pattern, loading at the breech with a very greasy paper cartridge and fired with a cap on a nipple, like a muzzle-loader. It was of large bore, threw a very heavy conical bullet with the help of a big charge of black powder and kicked like a horse. Yet some of the unkempt, untidy old men would make good practice with it on the range and were not a little proud of their skill.

The horses were very curiously assorted. The older men naturally preferred some quiet confidential animal of easy height for mounting and dismounting which, according to the standard of primitive west, would be a trifle over fourteen hands. Some of the few young men would bring weedy thoroughbreds of sixteen hands (I remember one of seventeen) which they had picked up for a few sovereigns in the hope of winning some miserable country race. A certain number brought cart-colts, pure and simple, generally four years old or under; and about half rode the best animal that they possessed, generally superior to the best stamp of regular troop-horse. These men, old and young, were,

in many cases, quite ready to ride in their own saddles without girths, and one and all would have been perfectly happy riding bare-backed, but they could not abide the military saddle of those days, which, in their opinion (and I confess that I sympathised with them) put too much leather between them and their horses. The crupper also was often a terrible provocation to kicking; and above all, the double bridle prescribed by regulation was a sore trial to most of the riders. Few of them had the habit of riding with a double bridle at all, much less when one hand was encumbered by a drawn sword; and not one was accustomed to the use of a powerful curb. Moreover, it is usual in the west to ride with a loose rein; and this, though all very well for galloping over the moor to hounds, is not well suited to military manœuvres.

Thus the confusion in the ranks on the first day or two of drill was appalling, though men and horses settled down to their work with astonishing quickness. The great difficulty with untrained men is to get them to move at the word of command, and to forget their friends at moments of crisis. The word is given, say, to move off at the trot. After some little delay they get under way gently and leisurely, until admonished that

they are twenty or thirty yards, instead of three, behind their leader. Then every spur—and a sharper spur than the horses have ever felt before—strikes in, every tail gives a whisk, a certain number of impatient noses bound into the air in front, a certain number of indignant heels fly up viciously in the rear, and the whole mass surges forward with irresistible violence. I remember once leading a column of troops at a trot down a grassy hill-side, which was soaked with rain and consequently presented rather uncertain foothold. My troop, finding itself comfortably in the front with plenty of room before it, at once checked its speed and began to lag behind, my own attention being wholly occupied by the endeavour to lead the column straight. They were forty yards in rear of me when they were bidden to move up to their leader, and then they came down like a whirlwind. One boring half-bred brute bolted out of the ranks at full speed, slipped up, half recovered himself, and slithered for full twenty yards before he came down with a thud that sent his rider flying far over his head. The rest followed close after him at a gallop. My attention was claimed by the unhorsed man, fortunately a young one, son of a tenant of my father's, who, pardonably flustered

by his fall, had jumped up and, seizing my stirrup, ran alongside me for some yards with his busby trailing on the ground, and poured out abject apologies for his mishap. I had hardly persuaded him to leave me before the order came for the head of the column to change direction, and then I caught sight of the fragments of my troop. Three had managed to pull up and were turning back to look after the fallen man; three more were galloping madly after his loose horse; one or two were going at top speed wherever their horses chose to take them; and the remainder were still descending the hill in full career. In fact the leading troop was reduced for the time to its leader only; but presently they came galloping up from all sides, and before the next halt they had all, without exception, sorted themselves into their places and were smiling with the keenest enjoyment of the fun. They must have knocked each other about a good deal in the course of the field-day, but their good humour was inexhaustible.

Altogether, though the men became astonishingly handy, work with the Yeomanry in those days was not very serious soldiering. The members of my own troop had many of them known me from childhood, and the ancestors of

not a few had been, for generations, tenants of my ancestors ; and to them I was an officer not because I held the Queen's commission, but because I was my father's son. When I went on parade I was received not by a row of impassive faces looking to their front, but with a bland smile, which of course I returned. And if, during a field-day, I seemed to be in danger from a bolting horse, or any other cause, the troop would shout like one man, " Look up (Devon for ' Take care '), Mr. John." It was on this footing, indeed, that most of the officers stood towards their men ; and there might be a worse. Once an inspecting officer, then of great reputation in the Army, though now forgotten, in the course of his inspection asked an officer, " What do you do, sir, to encourage recruits to join the Yeomanry and to interest men in the defence of their country ? "

" I keep a shorthorn bull, and let the members of my troop send a heifer to him," answered the officer with an unmoved face, but a twinkling eye.

" That's the very best answer I have ever received to that question," rejoined the inspector, who, though by just reputation a tartar, had not lost his sense of the ridiculous. Indeed, such

little affairs received a good deal of attention during the training. Sundry matrimonial alliances were arranged not only between bulls and heifers, but between mares and stallions, not omitting the actual tying of the nuptial knot. I remember once, when we were marching up to the drill-ground, a man suddenly overtaking us at a hard gallop (which of course set all the horses capering), and passing on to fall abruptly into the ranks of the next troop in front of my own. As he seemed to be followed by my men with a sympathetic eye, I asked an elderly sergeant who he was and what on earth he was doing. "'Tis Pridgin (Prettyjohn)," was the answer; "the Captain gave mun liberty to take his mare to the Captain's horse this morning."

Altogether I am glad to have caught a glimpse of the old Yeomanry, though I wish that I could have seen the still older Yeomanry when men rode their mares into the town with foals at foot. It is nevertheless an historical fact that in the evil years which followed Waterloo, when the police as yet were not, the Army was reduced to a shadow and the Militia was never embodied, the Yeomanry alone stood between England and anarchy.

L'Envoi

It is perhaps worth while to write a short epilogue upon the North Devon Yeomanry, now no longer existing. Before I left it thirty years ago the regiment passed under the command of a new colonel who completely transformed it. The old men disappeared ; young men took their place ; training and discipline were improved beyond all recognition ; and a complete scheme of mobilisation was worked out which set it in immediate readiness for active service. Thus, when it was necessary to send out a squadron to the South African War, the North Devon did so without the slightest effort, everything to the very last detail having been long before thought out and provided for. This, unless I am mistaken, was without a parallel among the Yeomanry at the time. So, too, after the South African War, the regiment sent a squadron to manœuvres ; and the cavalry general, under whom it served, reported that he would be well content to take it immediately upon active service. The South African War banished once for all the cheap sneers which for generations had been levelled at the Yeomanry.

Then came the German War. Once again the

mobilisation of the North Devon went like clockwork ; but the regiment was not favoured by the fortune of war. It was sent late to the Dardanelles and, before it had fired a shot, was practically destroyed by the sudden burst of Arctic weather which worked such havoc among the troops in the spring of 1916. It was re-formed, somehow, and (to cut matters short) was eventually converted, together with its sister regiment of Devon, into a battalion of infantry. As such it fought in Palestine, and in an attack there underwent an experience which it shared with scores, if not hundreds, of battalions in different fields of operations. It did its work brilliantly and attained its objective, but attained it alone, the troops upon both flanks being beaten back. It held its ground against all counter-attacks and lost very heavily, but of course was withdrawn when its situation was realised. Thus its efforts came to nothing through no fault of its own, or of any one else, and the battalion was fain to comfort itself with the General's sympathetic compliments and the knowledge that it had done its duty. The luck of war was against it, and in such cases no good soldier will feel that any regiment has any call to complain. How little it is realised by those unacquainted with military history that a regiment,

in order to gain public distinction, must be in the right sphere of operations, under the right commanders, in the right state of discipline, on the right spot, at the right time, under the eye of the right witness ; and that none of these conditions, saving the right state of discipline, can be fulfilled except by chance.

The next stage, as invariably happens at the close of a long and exhausting war, was that the original principles of organisation in the Army were perforce abandoned. The territorial system could not be maintained, and the battalion was broken up so that the men could be distributed where they were most sorely needed. Thus more than one North Devon yeoman found himself a kilted Highlander ; but quite possibly they were as near akin to the Highlands as any other man in their new battalion ; and in any case the North Devon Yeomanry had much earlier ceased to be such as it had been at the opening of the War. Yeomen and tenant-farmers are by no means of inexhaustible numbers, and regiments of yeomanry could not therefore survive many annihilations.

Since the War, the North Devon Yeomanry, together with many of its sister regiments, has ceased to be, or has been born again in the hardly recognisable form of artillery. I confess that I

mourn for it. Latterly the North Devon had been the delight of inspecting officers because it was almost unique as a genuine regiment of yeomanry, composed entirely of rustic men who rode their own horses, and not of townsmen riding hired horses. It had lived its strange intermittent life for more than one hundred and twenty years, and, if it had begun that life with something very like shirking and continued it in derision, it closed it with high endeavour and was buried with honour. Possibly circumstances may yet call for its revival, in which case it may be found that the country gentlemen, whom successive governments have for nearly three generations conspired to harass and to impoverish, can no longer afford to provide short-horn bulls and thoroughbred stallions as an attraction to recruits. But such of the old county families as survive will come forward, as in former times; and I fancy, though I may be prejudiced, that in Devon at any rate the tenant-farmers will still prefer to have the sons of those families for their officers.

THE DEVONSHIRE REGIMENT

Semper Fidelis

(1918)

On May 27, 1918, the 2nd Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment repelled successive enemy assaults with gallantry and determination, and maintained an unbroken front till a late hour. The stanchness of this battalion permitted defences . . . to be organised and their occupation by reinforcements to be completed. . . . Inspired by the *sang-froid* of their gallant commander, the few survivors, though isolated without hope of assistance . . . fought to the last with unhesitating obedience to orders. Thus the whole battalion, colonel, 28 officers, and 552 non-commissioned officers and men, responded with one accord and offered their lives in ungrudging sacrifice to the sacred cause of the Allies. (Abridged from Order of the Day, August 20, 1918, by General Berthelot, Commanding Fifth French Army.)

This is the tribute of a foreign General to an English battalion, a tribute republished in General Orders "for the information of all ranks," by

Sir Douglas Haig. Such an honour is not common; and the price paid by the battalion for the honour is even less common; wherefore it seems somewhat surprising that so little notice has been taken of it. Had the battalion concerned belonged to London, Lancashire or Scotland, more might have been heard of it; but even the Devons have a history, and it may be well to say a few words about them.

The old Eleventh Foot was raised in the west country in 1685 to meet the menace of Monmouth's rebellion, and was composed of loyal men from Somerset, Dorset and Devon. Being stanch Protestants, they joined the standard of the Prince of Orange in 1688, and were employed by him, from the beginning to the end of his reign, in Ireland, where, among other incidents, they relieved Londonderry, fought at the Boyne, and sat down with Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim to the siege of Limerick. In the War of the Spanish Succession they fought the campaign of 1703 under Marlborough, but in 1704 were taken away from the great John and sent to Spain. This was the first of a good many misfortunes. Instead of being victors at Blenheim, they were ignobly betrayed by the Portuguese at Portalegre, and, when released by

exchange from captivity, were shattered to pieces at the defeat of Almansa in 1707. Not until 1709 did they again take the field under Marlborough, and then too late for Malplaquet, though in time to lose heavily at the siege of Mons. In the following year they played their part in the capture of Douai, Bethune, Aire and St. Venant, and then were despatched with the abortive expedition to Canada in 1711. Their period of rest after the Peace of Utrecht was twice broken by service against Scottish rebels in 1715 and 1719; and in 1742 the War of the Austrian Succession called them again to Flanders. They fought at Dettingen, at Fontenoy, where they had over two hundred casualties, and at Roucoux, where after a very obstinate fight they succeeded in repulsing attacks of greatly superior numbers at the cost of yet another two hundred casualties. So far, therefore, they had closer acquaintance with defeat than with victory; and they were not fully indemnified by a share in most of Ferdinand of Brunswick's rather negative successes in 1760–62.

The Eleventh were in garrison in Minorca or in Ireland throughout the American War, and in 1782, when the territorial system was first established, they became the North Devon; the

Twentieth (now Lancashire Fusiliers) and the Forty-Sixth (now the Second Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry) being the other regiments of the county. At the outbreak of the War of the French Revolution in 1793 the regiment was embarked on board Lord Hood's fleet for service as Marines, and did brilliant work at Toulon and at Corsica, but to little purpose. The bad fortune which had always condemned it to unsuccessful enterprises was not yet exhausted, and the battalion was captured, for the third time in its career, in the raid upon Ostend in 1798. Then it was shipped off to the West Indies ; then to Madeira for the two years 1807–8 ; and at last to Portugal in 1809. There, though present at Bussaco, Sabugal and Fuentes de Oñoro, it had little chance of distinction until 1812, when it formed part of Hulse's Brigade of the Sixth Division. At last at Salamanca on the 22nd of July came the Eleventh's opportunity. The Sixth Division were called upon to defeat Clausel's counter-attack, and to sweep away the last line of French resistance. To accomplish this latter task they had to advance up the slope of a natural glacis under a terrific fire of grape and musketry ; but they were not to be stopped ; and after a fine struggle the French gave way. The losses of

Hulse's Brigade were terrible. The Eleventh went into action with four hundred and twelve bayonets; and their casualties amounted to sixteen officers and three hundred and twenty-five of other ranks killed and wounded. The remnant, a bare ninety of all ranks, formed a little square after the fight was over, when Hulse thanked them for their good work, which he could not find words to praise as it deserved. So the precedent was set that, even when three out of four of the Eleventh should have fallen, the fourth man must still fight on. Too weak to share in the great victory of Vittoria, the battalion recovered itself in time to take part in the dramatic actions of Sorauren, being formed, together with the remains of the Sixty-first (Second Gloucester), into a provisional battalion. They passed without any great opening for distinction through the battles of the Nivelle, the Nive and Orthez; but at Toulouse the Sixth Division was again called upon, as at Salamanca, to strike the decisive blow, and responded nobly to the summons. Hulse's Brigade led the way, and the Eleventh was at its head.

Then for more than sixty years active service came not in the way of the Eleventh. Their old number was taken from them, and they became the

one and only Devonshire Regiment. They had a trifling share in the Afghan War of 1879–80, but it was not until the Tirah campaign of 1897–98 that the public became aware of their existence. South Africa brought them more prominently forward ; and men came from all parts of England to enlist with them. In the German War they arrived on the scene after the retreat from Mons ; but we hear of them on the La Bassée canal in the winter of 1914, sorely tried but indomitable, " magnificent but weary," as a general officer styled them, magnificent even among the peerless battalions of the old Army. But, as at Salamanca, their opportunity came at last, and they seized it. Now it was not three out of four, but every officer and every man that was required to fall ; and the Devons answered to this supreme appeal as to all others. It would not become a civilian and a Devon man to add a word to General Berthelot's Order of the Day. The General, like a true soldier, speaks only of the cool courage of the commanding officer and the unhesitating obedience of all other ranks. Unhesitating obedience ! There lies the real test of a soldier—unhesitating obedience to the orders of the colonel, to the great traditions of the old Eleventh, to the unwritten laws of the county of Devon. Let the

rest be silence ; for there is a pride too high for words and a mourning too deep for tears. The epitaph of this battalion is written on the colours of the Devons, *Semper Fidelis* ; and it is sufficient. For these men were faithful indeed ; faithful to their King, faithful to their county, faithful to their regiment, faithful to themselves.

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*